

PLATO
AN INTERPRETATION

D. R. Khashaba

"Plato: An Interpretation," by D.R. Khashaba. ISBN 978-1-58939-721-7.

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PREFACE

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT PLATO probably "has never been studied more intensively than in the late twentieth century." Unfortunately we can also say that Plato probably has never been more misunderstood, travestied, and disfigured than in that same period.

Until late in the nineteenth century or early in the twentieth Platonists gave their various interpretations of the works of Plato. Later in the twentieth century, scholars no longer interpreted but dissected. They murdered Plato and were happily cutting up the cadaver into tiny pieces to examine them under their analytical microscopes.

It was not the intention of Plato in his writings, or in his oral teaching, to expound a finished system of philosophy. Just as the sole end of the Socratic elenchus was not, as is commonly supposed, to arrive at correct definitions but to arouse that creative aporia which led his interlocutors to confess their ignorance and to look for enlightenment within their own minds, so it was the aim of Plato to ignite in the souls of his hearers and readers that spark of understanding which "suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, ... is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself", as he puts it in Epistle VII.

It is therefore worse than useless – it is positively damaging – to subject the writings of Plato to minute analysis and formal criticism in an attempt to extort from them hard-fixed doctrines and a theoretical system. Plato's writings should be approached imaginatively, responsively, that we may glimpse in them the ineffable insights that could only be conveyed in myth and metaphor but never in fixed theoretical formulations.

I neither pretend nor intend to arrive at what Plato thought or taught. No one is entitled to claim a monopoly on understanding Plato's 'true' meaning, and I certainly make no such claim. Plato has left us some thirty pieces of verbal composition, which he created for his own amusement, as the *Phaedrus* 276d would suggest. My purpose in this

work is to present the philosophy I derive for myself from these, for my own satisfaction.

I enter into living dialogue with the living Plato and offer the understanding I come out with for myself from that dialogue, not claiming any authority or any veracity for my interpretation. I do what Plotinus did, what Augustine did, I draw from the flowing founts of Plato to water my own garden, and offer my version of Platonism for what it may be worth intrinsically.

This book grew out of a series of Excursions into the Dialogues of Plato that I had started some time in 2001. Chapters 1, 3, 5-8, are edited versions of six of those Excursions, which appeared on my website - <http://www.Back-to-Socrates.com> -; the first one has also been published in The Examined Life Online Journal. Chapter 2 is an edited version of an essay which I had written before starting the series of Excursions under the title "The Rationality of Socrates' Moral Philosophy". This too was published both on my website and in The Examined Life. The remaining chapters have been worked out of notes I had been preparing for the series.

The origination of the text in a series of separate essays accounts for the occurrence of many reiterations, sometimes even verbatim repetitions, throughout the book. I have not sought to remove all such reiterations, for two reasons. Firstly, that would have involved extensive re-writing and re-structuring. Beside the time and effort involved, the integrity and coherence of the individual chapters would probably have been negatively affected. Secondly, I will make bold to claim that the reiterations relate to thoughts that are original and important, directly opposed to views firmly ensconced in academic circles. Hence, there is justification and need for considerable reiteration and emphasis to drive those thoughts home. I know I am sticking my neck out in saying this: I am willing to take the consequences.

The ordering of the chapters represents a continuous progression from a basic insight, which I think we may ascribe to Socrates, through a vision, which is probably a Platonic development, to speculations and adventures of ideas which seem to have engaged Plato's attention late in life. I have no wish to draw any sharp line or lines at any point or points in this progression. Some problems treated with profundity and intensity at a late date might have been nagging at Plato's mind even in his youth; the *Lysis*, for instance, suggests problems that underlie, in my view, the dialectic of the *Parmenides*. A Plato would not be a Plato if he were not capable of musing radical questions even as a boy.

One topic that readers of my book will find conspicuous by its absence is politics. I do not believe that politics is a subject for philosophy proper. A philosopher as a person living in our actual world will necessarily be concerned with politics. S/he will, hopefully, bring to her/his politics the philosophic habit of mind, the concern for values nurtured by philosophy, but not any philosophically established political principles. There is no such thing. Plato as an Athenian and as a Hellene was earnestly concerned with the politics of his time and world. Whole libraries have been written about his political thought. I have nothing worthwhile to add in that area and I keep my peace.

A final cautionary word. This book is not for beginners; it is not an introduction to the study of Plato. It is only suitable for readers with an adequate acquaintance with the works of Plato and who moreover have those works under their hand for constant reference.

D. R. Khashaba
Sixth-October City, Egypt,
February, 2005

INTRODUCTION: INTERPRETING PLATO

*houtos humôn, ô anthrôpoi, sophôtatos
estin, hostis hôsper Sôkratês egnôken
hoti oudenos axios esti têi alêtheiai pros
sophian.*

*(He among you, o humans, is most wise
who, like Socrates, knows that he is truly
worth nothing in respect of wisdom.)*

Apology, 23b.

I

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PLATO and our understanding of the nature of philosophy are two sides of a coin. The dominant academic conception of the nature of philosophical thinking vitiates both our understanding of philosophy and our interpretation of Plato.

The sorry plight into which philosophy has fallen, was the result of philosophy having been expected, and its being deluded into claiming, to serve the same ends as science. It was expected to, and foolishly claimed to, seek true and certain factual knowledge. This is a snare philosophy has to extricate itself from. Unfortunately, this pernicious confusion of philosophy with science has confounded all the terms needed for discussing the question: 'knowledge', 'truth', 'understanding', 'reason', etc., all of these terms suffer ambiguity and can lead to much obfuscation and misunderstanding unless we pay careful attention to the special usage of an individual writer. Because I aim at a radical

revision of our understanding of these terms I am painfully aware of the fact that I am especially liable to be misunderstood when using them.

Just as facts about the natural world cannot be quarried from within the human mind, so understanding cannot be found outside of the human mind. If we choose, as is reasonable, to confine the epithet 'truth' to the ascertainment of facts, then since, as Kant saw, no factual knowledge can be derived from pure reasoning, we can say that pure reasoning is not concerned with truth. Our factual knowledge cannot extend beyond our experience, as Locke and Hume rightly insisted. On the other hand all meaning, all intelligibility, we 'find' in the given phenomena of experience, is infused into the phenomena by the mind. It is only then that they turn from blind and brute experiential stuff into ordered, meaningful facts.

Furthermore, the mind not only projects patterns that give meaningfulness and intelligibility to the content of experience, but goes on to create second-order and third-order ideas and ideals that have their whole being in the mind, and have reality (as, in my usage, opposed to existence) in the special sense of constituting a plane of being realized in active, creative intelligence. 'God', 'the soul', moral ideals and values, as creations of the mind, are fictions or myths if you will, but they constitute the reality of the spiritual plane of being that is the peculiar characteristic of humankind.

Religion is wrong when it represents these as facts and houses them in space and time. Science is wrong when it discounts these realities because they fail the criteria of objective verifiability. Philosophy is wrong when it thinks itself obliged to choose between siding with the irrationality of religious faith on the one hand and accepting the reductionist verdict of objective science on the other hand.

Philosophy should see itself as a species of poetry, rational poetry, creatively and coherently dreaming, mythologizing, unfolding the realities of the spiritual life, soberly confessing its outpourings to be dreams, fictions, and myths, but dreams, fictions, and myths that constitute our proper, true, and most precious realities. This, I believe, was the profound insight and vision of Plato, and this, I believe, was the essence of Kant's outlook, though Kant was too much under the influence of the rationalism of his age to give full, clear, and consistent expression to his basically true outlook.

At one point in the *Phaedo* (84c-88b) both Simmias and Cebes raise objections to Socrates' initial argument for the immortality of the soul. In responding to Cebes, Socrates begins by giving an account of his experience with philosophical thinking, the famous 'autobiography' (96a-101e), which amounts to renouncing not only all objective

knowledge but also all demonstration or proof in philosophy. This is what I refer to as the Socratic principle of philosophic ignorance.

In philosophy we do not seek, and can never have, proven conclusions: we seek intelligibility, understanding, a coherent vision. We approach that goal when we have a system or network of concepts, ideals, values, that is internally coherent and harmonious and has the virtue of infusing the various phases and aspects of our life-experience with meaningfulness and value. That is how philosophy, and only philosophy, can take over the role that religion formerly played in human society. As I have been repeatedly saying, a philosophy creates a universe of discourse which brings into being a domain of intelligibility in which the mind can have its proper life as active, creative intelligence.

This poses a philosophical dilemma. If there can be no finality in philosophical thinking, if no philosophical conclusions can be definitive or certain, how can we avoid thoroughgoing relativism in morals and scepticism in general? At this point in the *Phaedo* (88c-91c), Socrates warns his audience against losing faith in reason in words that superficially sound like a reversal of the Socratic principle of philosophic ignorance. But only superficially, for Socrates finds assurance in the self-evidence of the intelligible form. In the end, we find the only secure ground in the reality of the active, creative *nous*; we find that *phronêsis* is the whole of virtue and the whole of reality.

The Socratic principle of philosophic ignorance in Plato develops into the dialectic that destroys its own hypotheses. To overcome Pyrrhonism, ancient and modern, and out-and-out relativism, we need a conception of dynamic rationality, where reason is constantly alive and active and never static. Antisthenes and Wittgenstein equally suffered for want of such a dynamic conception of reason.

The Socratic conception of the intelligible is the foundation of Platonism. The intelligible is born in the mind. No idea comes to us from outside. No sensation is in itself intelligible. The idea of equality is not derived from experience. We might see a million equal things a million times and still not have the idea 'equal' until it flashes in the mind: "Of course, these are equal!" And it is not necessary to see many equal things to form the idea 'equal'; a single pair of equal things seen only once can be the occasion for the creation of the idea. Again, we can have the idea 'equal' and apply it to many equals without having the idea 'equality', which we should not call a higher abstraction but a higher-order idea.

And this is not true only of imperceptible things like the idea 'equal'. We can see trees and have no idea of a tree until we single it out of the

nebulous totality of seen things and give it a distinctive character. My seeing a tree is an event. But my calling it a tree, my knowing it for a tree, is a rational act, a creative act of the mind, by which the tree becomes *to me*, not a given thing, not an impression fed into me from outside, but a meaning. This is the essence of Socrates' distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible.

Socrates, because of his preoccupation with morals, did not speak of the ideas of physical things, but only of ethical notions. But the extension and development of the idea is true to the Socratic insight. Scholars, failing to appreciate the revolutionary originality of Socrates' conception of the intelligible realm and of the creativity of the mind, and seeing the Platonic 'separate forms' and 'separate soul' as novel doctrines without foundation in the Socratic quest, make Socrates into a tame preacher of common morality and Plato into a foolish advocate of indefensible doctrines.

A philosophical problem opens up for human thought a domain for creative conceptual exploration. That is the principal thing that an original thinker contributes to the human cultural heritage. A 'solution' to the problem is a mapping of the domain from a particular perspective. Thales gave us the problem of the universe. Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Whitehead (to pick up names at random) gave their various mappings of the *Problembereich* (to use a happy German word). Socrates gave us the problem of the intelligible realm and the problem of the eternity of the soul (camouflaged in Plato's works as the immortality of the soul). Parmenides gave us the problem of Reality, of which Plato gave the grandest, sublimest mapping in the vision of the Form of the Good. These are all creative conceptions that you cannot find in or derive from anything outside the mind.

I have repeatedly, both elsewhere and in the following pages, put forward the view that philosophy is a creative endeavour, oracularly proclaiming ideas and ideals that confer meaning and value on the givennesses of experience and on human life. In philosophical thinking we start from a given, more or less chaotic whole, and proceed to a creative, imaginative re-presentation in a more coherent whole. The representation is creative – no formal rules can make it necessarily derivable from the initial whole – and being a representation it is necessarily a falsification. Not being necessarily derivable, the derivation can always be challenged. Being necessarily a falsification, the representation can always be refuted. This is the explanation of the endless controversies of philosophers. However carefully framed the premises, however astutely guarded the derivation, the consequence

brings in something that is only there by grace of creativity. It is an impostor, though a divine impostor.

An original philosopher, who will not merely re-state the views of others, finds a new way of looking at things. That philosopher then presents her/his view, expounds it, elucidates it, exemplifies it, sings paeans in its praise. All of that is as it should be. But then s/he goes on to say that all other views are wrong, which is bad enough, but what is worse is that s/he does not stop at that but goes on to 'prove' that all other views are wrong by showing that they fail to reveal what her/his vision reveals, not realizing that the 'truth' thus revealed is the product of the peculiar way of looking at things. This is the source of all philosophical feuds. Philosophers should realize that every philosopher creates – strictly speaking – a whole new intelligible universe that does not negate other intelligible universes.

There are propositions which any human being worth his salt will be willing to fight for and die for, but not – if s/he be a true philosopher – assert as definitively literal truth. In philosophical discussion, a conclusion is only *anagkaion ek tôn hōmolegēmenōn*, a phrase we meet with frequently in the dialogues: what is necessary is only necessary as proceeding from what has earlier been agreed; but what has been agreed can always be questioned, and must always be questioned, if we are not to be enslaved by our own creations. In philosophy no statement is ever good for good, simply and without qualification. Plato is never forgetful of this. Those who speak with assurance of Plato's theory of this and theory of that should remind themselves of this.

It is a paradox of human thought and human communication that we are necessitated to carry out our thinking and our intercourse in ambiguous terms. The Leibnizean dream of a perfect language is a chimera. Except within systems of purely formal, abstract symbols, which, however enormous may be their practical utility, are of strictly restricted applicability, all living thought and discourse, all thought and discourse relating to (I am at a loss for an epithet) 'concrete', 'real', 'organic' situations, can only be carried out in fluid, ambiguous, hazy terms. Otherwise they would fail to be relevant to the ever-changing, never-static, actualities of life.

That is why in poetry and in philosophy at its best, language is most indefinite and most inspirative. When people are oblivious of this, individual thinking is dogmatic, bigoted, intolerant, and conversants throw all kinds of accusations at each other. If and when we are aware of this insight which Socrates and Plato never tired of disseminating, we can humbly and patiently work continually towards more and more

clarity in our understanding of ourselves and towards more mutual sympathetic understanding with our fellow-humans.

Plato more than once speaks of giving a *logos alêthês* when he is about to offer a *muthos*. The two are inseparable: the *logos alêthês* can only be embodied in myth. This is the lesson about the nature of philosophical thinking that we should have learned from Plato, but which we are too clever to grasp.

Plato gave us the profoundest truths about ourselves and about Reality in winged myths — the eternal forms, the immortal soul, anamnesis. Our learned scholars turn the myths into silly dogmata, into transparently erroneous doctrines, and all is lost: the inspirational core, the inspired insight, is dissipated when its housing shell of myth is shattered.

Thus scholars find in Plato's works theories that they proceed to prove untenable, and since those theories are all they see in Plato, or all they are interested in, with their demolition are lost all the insights he clothed in those 'theories' — insights that have enriched humanity, that have in truth translated humanity into a new plane of being. Our life has been so much the poorer because we insist on being so much the cleverer. We have become materialists instead of idealists, and we tell ourselves that it can't be helped, that otherwise we would be fooling ourselves. And why is that so? Only because we have fallen to the scientistic delusion: we think that our philosophy must be true to and of the world. We fail to see that theoretical materialism and theoretical idealism are nothing but ways of looking at things and that it is entirely up to us to adopt this or that view. Our philosophy has nothing to do with the way the world is and has everything to do with what life we choose to live.

It is futile to subject the writings of Plato to the rigour of logical analysis, whether to refute him by showing him to be inconsistent or to vindicate him by discovering consistency underneath the apparent inconsistency. Plato does not give us a neat philosophical system. Plato gives us insight and inspiration that help us look into our own reality to which we may then give expression in philosophical positions of our own making. The harmony and unity in Plato's overall philosophical positions come from the unity of the radical insight into that one reality, our own reality as intelligent beings, which then flows and meanders in many streams that may diverge or criss-cross without disowning their common source.

Scholars torment themselves needlessly in trying to hammer Plato's various views and positions into a well-ordered and consistent system. He was not giving an account of objective actualities but giving

mythical expression to ineffable realities, and was at liberty to modify his images and imaginative descriptions. You don't ask a painter who paints several landscapes of a favourite location to make copies of his own work, or one who paints more than one portrait of a single person, even at one and the same period of his subject's life, to produce identical portraits. It is our confusing the nature of philosophy with that of science (which alone is concerned with objective actualities), that is at the root of interminable scholarly controversy and endless futile attempts to force the thought of great creative philosophers into nicely set moulds. Plato only provides the most remarkable illustration of this because he is the most highly creative, but it is true in the case of all great philosophers, the more so the more profound and original a philosopher is.

I do not argue from the text of Plato to demonstrate, support, or defend any position. It is always possible to argue from the same text to an opposite position. I interpret and develop the text to produce an intrinsically coherent position. You can give a metaphysical interpretation to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, and your interpretation may be valuable in itself, but you cannot say that that was what Beethoven had in mind when he composed his Fifth or what Coleridge had in mind when he dreamed *Kubla Khan*.

II

Aristotle in his *Physica*, referring to Plato's identification of space and matter in the *Timaeus*, adds parenthetically, "It is true, indeed, that the account he gives there of the 'participant' is different from what he says in his so-called 'unwritten teaching'" (*Physica*, 209b12-15, tr. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye). The phrase *agrapha dogmata*, translated here 'unwritten teaching', has given rise to endless, often wild, guesswork. Taken in conjunction with what Plato says in the *Phaedrus* and Epistle VII against the possibility of putting the profoundest philosophical thought in writing, and also with references here and there to Plato's "lecture on the Good", it has led the Tübingen school to maintain that Plato had an esoteric philosophy taught to an exclusive inner circle of disciples.

For some forty years of his life Plato was the head of an institution of learning. Naturally, he lectured, he talked, he conversed, and he earnestly believed that, for communicating his profoundest thoughts, writing trailed far behind the word of mouth in value. Does that justify us in holding that the oral teaching was of a different nature from that

we glean from the written works? If a writer, Iris Murdoch, say, or Umberto Eco, expresses her/him/self now in theoretical treatises, now in fiction, drama, or poetry, do we expect to find in the theoretical works thoughts crucially different from those we find in the literary works? And supposing that Plato taught in the Academy things he purposely held back from his written works, now, if we don't have a reliable and coherent account of those esoteric teachings – and we don't –, what would all our wrangling and quarrelling about those hidden teachings avail us? Let those who find pleasure in pursuing that game by all means indulge themselves, but let them not pretend or claim to add an iota to our understanding of Plato or to our philosophical understanding in general.

When Aristotle speaks of Plato's *agrapha dogmata*, I take that to be of no more import than when a writer today refers to a yet unpublished paper of a particular thinker, or to some private communication or conversation with that thinker. When 'Socrates' in the *Republic* says he cannot give an account of the Good, but only of an offspring of the Good, and when Plato both in the *Phaedrus* (274c-278b) and in the Seventh Epistle (341c-d) says that the profoundest philosophical insights cannot be put in writing, that is not because Socrates or Plato reserve these insights for a privileged circle, but for the very good reason clearly explained in both the *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Epistle, and that can also be gleaned from the *Symposium* and the *Republic*: those insights are in the strictest sense ineffable because they are beyond the powers of language, and that not for any mysterious reason, but because that insight is a live subjective experience that has to be lived. To preclude misunderstanding I will add two marginal remarks. Firstly, to say that Plato did not reserve the profoundest insights for an esoteric circle does not contradict the commonsense fact that philosophical discourse does not suit every audience. Secondly, if Plato's view makes philosophical insight look very much like mystic enlightenment, that is not to be denied, but there is a difference both in the steps leading to the mystic experience in either case, and, more importantly, in the interpretation put on the experience. Mystics normally interpret their subjective experience in terms of their traditional beliefs. When they do that simply and by necessity to give articulate expression to those experiences, and when that expression is frankly regarded as poetically symbolic, there is no conflict with philosophy; but when the interpretation is believed to be literally true, that constitutes superstition which enslaves the mind. That is why Plato insists that no determinate formulation of philosophical principles or

conclusions can be definitive; that is why Plato maintains that dialectic must destroy all of its hypotheses.

What does it benefit us to debate whether Plato had an esoteric philosophy that he expounded solely to his closest followers, when in the nature of the case we can have no means whatever for knowing what that teaching was? Whatever interest the question may have as a historical riddle, I don't see how it can be of any philosophical significance unless it be the negative import that we should not take the extant works of Plato seriously. That would be a plausible position. But against that position I maintain (1) that we have in the dialogues a philosophy of unequalled profundity, coherence and value, and (2) that this in no way conflicts with or is precluded by Plato's explicit assertion that written texts by themselves cannot impart philosophical insight, for the dialogues do not give us any fixed truths, but afford us occasion to search our soul and find reality and value within ourselves.

It does seem from Aristotle's references to Plato's *agrapha dogmata* that these related principally, perhaps exclusively, to mathematical questions. Assuming then that Plato had reserved for teaching in the Academy the most highly technical subjects, as would be quite understandable, we can legitimately pose two questions: (1) Can we garner a clear account of Plato's teaching on those subjects? (2) If we can, will that radically affect our understanding of the philosophical position we may gather from the written works? If the 'unwritten doctrines' related to mathematics or astronomy or other scientific disciplines, then the answer to the first question would perhaps be of interest to mathematicians, astronomers, and historians of science. As for the second question, my answer is an emphatic No. I do not think the *Principia Mathematica* throws any light on the strictly philosophical work of either Bertrand Russell or A. N. Whitehead. I know that to many this will be indisputable proof of my stark ignorance. Let it be.

A. E. Taylor tells us that "there were several different versions in the next generation of the famous lecture 'on the good,' which seems to have contained Plato's most explicit account of his own philosophy" (*Plato: The Man and His Work*, 1926, p.503). Has anybody ever been able to extract a clear and undisputed resume of that "most explicit account"? Further on Taylor says, "Consequently we have to discover Plato's ultimate metaphysical positions indirectly from references to them in Aristotle, supplemented by occasional brief excerpts, preserved by later Aristotelian commentators, from the statements of Academic contemporaries of Aristotle, like Xenocrates and Hermodorus." So in our groping and fumbling for the substance of Plato's *agrapha dogmata*

we are reduced to relying on what Aristoxenus, for instance, said that Aristotle had said that Plato had said in his lecture on the Good. And we are supposed to rest all our hope in understanding Plato's philosophy on that Holy Grail quest.

In my view, the philosophy of Plato is a philosophy we imbibe from the dialogues, each of which has, usually, more than one goal. The philosophy we get in this manner out of the dialogues is, as I see it, a development of the philosophical principles and outlook of Socrates. If we say that Plato conveyed the essence of that philosophy to his students in his lectures in a different manner and different style, all of that stands to reason and is the most natural of things. But I insist on two points: (1) Plato would not and could not in his lectures give a definitively formulated theory of the Good or of anything; that would go directly against his understanding of dialectic. The insight into the Good, which is the highest goal of philosophizing, could not be imprisoned in a definite formulation of words whether written or oral. It is not a 'knowledge' but a plane of mature intelligence attained with the help of dialectic exercise in the manner described in the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, and the Seventh Epistle. Plato's other strictures against written texts as in the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedrus* are marginal to this. (2) Our attempts to reconstruct a system of philosophy that 'goes beyond anything we can find in the dialogues' out of conjectures about teachings that were never put in writing and whose immediate witnesses left no testimony — of what value can such attempts be? Supposing there were a tradition that Shakespeare refused, on principle, to put down what he regarded as his most perfect poems in writing; he refused to read them to large audiences; he only recited them to a select circle of close friends; those friends mentioned the divine poems here and there, saying they were unlike anything he had published, but did not leave any record of their contents; one by one those friends left our world. That of course would constitute an irresistible temptation to scores and hundreds of poets to try to 'recreate' those lost poems, but would we consider those creations Shakespeare's?

In the *Apology* Socrates says, *egô de didaskalos men oudenos pôpote egenomên. ei de tis mou legontos kai ta emautou prattontos epithumei akouein, eite neôteros eite presbuteros, oudenî pôpote ephthonêsa*, "I have never been teacher to anyone, but if anyone, while I am speaking and carrying on my mission, desired to listen, be he young or old, I have never grudged that to anyone" (33a). Socrates did not think anyone unfit to participate in philosophical discussion. If Plato later came to believe otherwise, it was because he was convinced (bitterly taught by the sad case of Alcibiades and others) that such

discussions, to bear fruit, must be sustained, extending over a long period of time, and be approached seriously and with goodwill, not because there was any special body of knowledge or belief that could not be divulged to outsiders. Plato knew that philosophical truth is a 'light suddenly kindled as from a leaping spark' — a light which no fixed words can adequately represent. The words, written or spoken, can only help strike the spark. That is why extended intercourse with a great mind is a necessary condition for the attainment of philosophical insight.

Plato's injunction against taking any written text too seriously should be applied to the text containing that injunction itself. Plato was actively engaged in writing from early youth till the end of his life. He was writing partly because he found pleasure in doing so, partly to give pleasure to his readers. But that was not all. His writings were serious, were profound, were vital, and were meant to be all that. Was there a philosophical 'truth' over and above and beyond what those writings conveyed? Let those who believe that go in search of their Holy Grail. In my view, Plato believed that philosophical 'truth' cannot be conveyed in any definitive formulation of words, written or spoken. Philosophical insight is to be gained through self-examination helped by intelligent discourse, and all of Plato's writings were just such discourse, aiming to help readers towards self-examination and towards philosophical insight. In his oral discourses he could have done no more. Plato's warning against taking any written text too seriously was a warning against taking any determinate verbal formulation as encapsulating a fixed, definitive 'truth'. This is the same lesson we find in the Platonic conception of dialectic.

Plato himself would not claim for his written works that they could take the place of living discussion; but for us, rightly approached and taken in the light of all Plato's warnings and clarifications, they do. Rightly approached, they enable us to enter into dialogue with Plato and — more importantly — with ourselves. And to be sure, a dialogue with Plato, even through the printed word, is by far superior to face-to-face discussion with many a living professional philosopher. Even in our day, Plato is still the best school of philosophy — absolutely the best.

III

A tale Father told us when I was a little boy went something like this. An impostor went to the Caliph's court, claiming he was a learned

and wise man. The Caliph said the pretender would have to undergo examination by the court sage. It was agreed that the examination should take the form of a dialogue in sign language. The two men stood face to face. The court sage pointed with his index finger; the other man pointed with two fingers. The sage motioned with his finger upwards; the other motioned downwards. The sage produced a chicken egg; the other produced a live chick. The visiting pretender was asked to retire and the Caliph asked the court sage for his testimony. The sage was full of praise: the man was truly learned and wise. He explained: "I have examined him in theology. I said, 'God is One' and he replied, 'Without a second'. I said, 'He created the heavens' and he responded, 'And the Earth'. I said, 'He brings forth the dead from the living' and he added, 'And the living from the dead'." The court sage then retired and the pretender was brought in. "What do you say of our sage?", asked the Caliph. "An insolent scoundrel, but I gave him measure for measure", answered the man. "How so?" "He said, 'I'll puncture your eye'; I said, 'I'll do in both of yours'. He said, 'I'll fling you up in the air'; I said, 'I'll dump you down to the ground'. He said, 'I'll make you cough up eggs'; I said, 'I'll make you hatch them'." — Each of the two men only projected what was within himself. Who can say that either of them was right or wrong?

So, to each her or his own Plato. In the following pages I present my own Plato. I ask no one to say that I am right, but let no one say that I am wrong. All one can say is that the Plato I present is worthy or worthless. *akoue dê to emon onar, eite dia keratôn eite di' elephantos elêluthen* (hear then my dream, be it coming through the horn or through the ivory gate, *Charmides*, 173a).

PART ONE:
THE SOCRATIC INSIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTELLIGIBLE FORMS

Prefatory

IF YOU ASK ANYONE who has only a nodding acquaintance with philosophy, "What is Plato best known for?", s/he will most probably answer without hesitation, "The theory of Ideas (Forms)". Yet if you ask any number of professional philosophers to give an account of that theory, you will find little agreement among their answers.

While some scholars (such as Burnet and A. E. Taylor) ascribe the fully-fledged 'theory' as it putatively appears in the middle-period dialogues to Socrates, and find it amply evidenced in the earliest dialogues, and while Burnet maintains that the 'theory' is absent from the 'distinctively Platonic' dialogues (*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, Ch. IX., Sect. 119), others (such as Richard Kraut) hold that the 'Theory of Ideas (Forms)' is a doctrine of Plato's that makes its first appearance in the dialogues of the middle period, notably in the *Phaedo*. (*The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, 1992, ch. 2, "The intellectual background", p.72.) Neither view, in my opinion, is adequate.

The doctrine of intelligible forms is at the root of Socrates' thought and is the rationale of the Socratic elenchus. If in the *Phaedo* (a middle-period dialogue) we find him saying, "It seems to me, if there is anything beautiful besides beauty in itself, then it is beautiful by nothing other than that it shares (*metechei*) of that beauty" (100c), this is nothing but another one of the verbal variations with which Plato never ceases to experiment in trying to make finite language – which is necessarily imperfect – give expression to the infinite mystery of the presence of reality in what is essentially unreal. In the *Euthyphro* we have a most clear formulation of the concept of the intelligible form, in precisely the same terms as in the *Phaedo*: *mian tina idean* of piety (5d), *ekeino auto to eidos hōi panta ta hosia hosia estin* (6c). In the

Hippias Major Socrates asks, "Are not all beautiful things beautiful by beauty?" (287c-d.)

On the other hand, the Socratic conception of intelligible forms was fundamental to the whole of Plato's outlook and I will try to show that we find that conception firmly ensconced in all of the late dialogues up to and including the *Laws*, no less than in the *Phaedo* or any of the early ones.

So to the question, does Plato have a 'Theory of Ideas (Forms)'?, my answer is No. Plato fully embraced the Socratic conception of intelligible forms: throughout his life that conception was pivotal for his thought and formed the basis of his whole outlook on the meaning of life and reality. From fairly early in his career and to the very end of his life, he experimented with approaches and formulations that might throw light on the question of how the many existent entities of the sensible world stood to the intelligible world. He never considered any of those formulations as more than a likely tale. He never had a finished 'Theory of Ideas' and never tried to prove or demonstrate the truth of any of those formulations. I know that in saying this I am making very daring claims. I will attempt in what follows to show (1) that the conception of forms was basic in Socrates' thought; (2) that that conception is evident in the early dialogues; (3) that that conception continued to inform the life-work of Plato to the end; (4) that he never offered, or pretended that he had, a finished Theory of Ideas (Forms).

The intelligible realm

It is impossible to separate any aspect of Socrates' thought from his moral stance, for Socrates was a man in whom the integrity of thought and personal life was most complete. And his moral stance can be epitomized as follows: The well-being (*eudaimonia*) of a human being resides in fulfilling the proper excellence (*aretê*) of a human being; and the proper excellence of a human being is intelligence (*nous*, *phronêsis*). To live as an intelligent being is to be guided in one's life by ideas and ideals bred by intelligence. These ideas and ideals are to be found nowhere in the natural world. They spring from the mind (*psuchê*). Those are the intelligible forms (*noêta eidê*) which it is the business of every human being to examine, to understand, to free from the dross of imposed accretions and thoughtless assumptions. The Socratic elenchus was meant to do just that.

Although it is to be expected that a youth with Socrates' endowments, growing up amid the tremendous intellectual and spiritual

ferment of mid-fifth-century BC Hellas must have fallen for a time to the lure of the great physical speculations that were cropping up on all sides, yet, from the 'autobiographical' account in the *Phaedo* (95-102) it would appear that Socrates soon gave up those speculations, not only because of the uncertainty of those studies (as the *Phaedo* account would suggest), but also because Socrates' true interest lay elsewhere. Socrates was in the first place concerned with the moral or – a better because more comprehensive term – spiritual life of humans.

Socrates saw clearly that it is in virtue of the ideas of honour, valour, loyalty, reasonableness, and the like, that a human being is human; that only by living under the governance of such ideas and in the light of reason that a person lives a specifically human life. And since he also held that our dignity and worth reside wholly in our living the life proper to human beings, he saw it as his life mission to examine those ideas himself and exhort others to examine them.

In his address to the tribunal that sentenced him to death, he plainly declares that he considered it his mission thus to examine others and in examining others to examine himself and that "this happens to be the greatest good for a human being, daily to discourse about virtue, ... examining myself and the others, an unexamined life being no life for a human being" (*Apology*, 38a).

The one truth that Socrates lived by, lived for, and died for, is that human beings are human in virtue of their *phronêsis*, *nous*, *psuchê* – whatever you like to call it. It is that one power that gives human life its meaning and value, and the tendance of that power must be our main business in life. A corollary of this is that we live our specifically human life in the world of ideas furnished by that power. To be human is to live – in the strictest sense of the word – in a world of conceptions, ideals, values, dreams (true or false).

Forms

For Socrates and for Plato those ideas are what matter and are what we know. Whenever we call numerous things by one name, it is because the mind confers a specific character on those things. It is that character which we know; it is those characters which people our specifically human world. In Plato's dialogues such a character is referred to as *auto to*, *eidos*, *idea*, or *ousia*, indifferently.

Many of the earlier dialogues share a common pattern. In the course of a casual conversation, mention is made of a virtue, or Socrates may manoeuvre to smuggle in the word: in the *Charmides* it is temperance;

in the *Laches* it is courage; in the *Euthyphro* it is piety. Socrates takes hold of the word and shows himself desirous, by the help of his interlocutor, to understand just what this virtue is in itself.

The question, when it comes, is put simply and directly: "Tell me what you say temperance is" (*Charmides*, 159a). "Let us first try to say what courage is ... Try to tell me, what is courage?" (*Laches*, 190d-e). "What do you say the pious is and what the impious?" (*Euthyphro*, 5d). And when the interlocutor fails to understand the true intent of Socrates' question, as they commonly do, and answers by giving instances of the virtue in question, Socrates takes pains to explain that what he is after is not an instance and not an inventory of instances, but *auto to ...*, the character in itself, the one form, *idea* (*Euthyphro*, 5d). So he remonstrates with Euthyphro: "Remember then that I did not ask you to show me one or two out of the many instances of piety, but to show me the character itself (*auto to eidos*) by which all that is pious is pious" (6d). Thus Socrates makes plain what it is he is after when he raises such a question: he wants to arrive at what gives a thing its character (*eidos*). "Is it not by justice that the just are just?" (*Hippias Major*, 287c).

It is that search for an intelligible character distinct from the instances in which it is exemplified and the insistence on the logical and axiological priority of the unique intelligible character over the many existent entities that is the core of Socrates' whole thought and that is his lasting contribution to human thought. It forms the pivot of Plato's Idealism and is the origin of what was to be known as the theory of Ideas (Forms).

In our speech we use words like good, bad, just, brave, equal, small, large. It is not possible to think or to communicate without such counters for general characters. Aristotle tells us we get our general ideas (universals) by abstraction from the things we experience. But what really is abstraction? A thousand trees seen one after the other or one beside the other will remain a thousand disparate impressions or a single conglomerate impression. It is only when the mind creates the character 'tree' and decrees, "I will call that a tree", that a tree becomes a tree.

Likewise I see many things small and big. But nothing in itself is small or big. Nothing in my immediate experience is small or big. It is not enough that I see a thousand or a million small things to form the idea small, for nothing of what I see is small until I have named it small; nothing is small or big until I have created the distinctions small and big. This is so for every character, for every name. The mind

creates a pattern by virtue of which the given in experience becomes meaningful.

In the *Republic* Socrates says that we assume a single form (*eidos*) whenever there are many particulars to which we apply the same name (596a). As we have often been told, we have on the one hand numerous beautiful things and numerous good things, and on the other hand, a beautiful in itself and a good in itself, each a single form (*idea*), a single being, that which is. So in the *Phaedo* we read: *thômen oun ... duo eidê tôn ontôn, to men horaton, ta de aides*; (79a). This is the foundation stone of Socrates' whole philosophy. (Here *eidê* of course is simply 'classes', 'kinds', not 'forms' in the Platonic sense.) And the non-perceptible forms are *to "ho estin"* (that which is, that which is real). For Plato *to "ho estin"* is the intelligible and only the intelligible. Again and again and again in the dialogues we find *ousia, to on, ho estin* used as equivalents, sometimes in the same paragraph or even in the same sentence one of these terms is used and then another as perfectly synonymous. A classic example is to be found in the famous passage of the *Phaedo* at 78d.

Socrates saw clearly that the forms which make discourse possible are not to be found in the objective world, do not come to us from outside us, but are born in the mind. The whole of Socrates' life-work makes no sense apart from this, and whether we ascribe the 'doctrine' of anamnesis to Socrates or to Plato, it was a fine mythical expression of the insight that all understanding is a flowering of the soul (mind). The truth at the core of the doctrine of reminiscence is the priority of the intelligible form for understanding.

To say that ideas are creations of the mind is not to say that they are arbitrary fictions: they are significant patterns in which alone the things of the world become meaningful. Parmenides posed for himself the problem of Reality. He equated reality with perfection. What is perfectly real must be perfect. The finite, the particular, the mutable, all in one way or another fall short of perfection. All cry out for something beyond themselves. Their imperfect being does not explain itself. They are unintelligible. They cannot be real. Only what is whole, self-sufficient, self-contained, can be real and intelligible. Reality having been identified with perfection is also identified with intelligibility. Only what is real is intelligible and only what is intelligible is real. All of these thoughts are not 'natural', are not supported by or derivable from anything that is given in our experience. They are all presumptions, imperious dictates of a creative mind that knows no law but its own word. Yet from Anselm to Descartes these identities were seen as axiomatic and as binding on Reality.

The Socratic aitia

In the 'autobiographical' passage of the *Phaedo* (95-102)), Socrates distinguishes two kinds of explanation — a radical and vital distinction which, it seems to me, has not been sufficiently imbibed by subsequent thinkers. On the one hand there is natural (physical) explanation. This is the explanation by natural 'causes' which is the proper procedure of science and which I have no need to describe or to explain; it is the method that has given us all our present-day knowledge and all our present-day technological achievements. This method has been so successful that we now find it hard to grasp that there can be any other. But, as Socrates clearly saw, this method can give us useful factual knowledge and control over the powers of nature, but gives us no understanding. He sought an approach that would give us intelligibility, and he found that in the pure idea. It is in the light of the idea created by the mind that the thing shines in its self-evident reality. Thus it is the idea of beauty, the ideal of beauty, that explains the beauty of particular beautiful objects. It is when the ideal of beauty is a reality for a person that that person can find beauty in things. An individual for whom the ideal of justice is not a reality can never understand why his honest neighbour refuses to take advantage of another when he could do so with impunity. So Socrates insists that philosophical explanation (i.e., understanding as opposed to factual knowledge) can only be found in embracing the simple pure idea. He explains the difference between the two methods by a memorable example. He is seated in his prison awaiting execution. A scientist can give an account of his position and posture by telling us of muscles and sinews, of bones and sockets, and of the mechanisms connected with them. But that will not make us understand why he is in his Athens prison docilely awaiting death rather than in the safety of a foreign city where his friends were ready to conduct him. It is his ideas of what is right and honourable that explain his remaining there to die rather than fleeing (98c-99a).

Socrates goes on to say that, having found that inquiry into the things of nature did not yield the understanding he sought, he decided to take refuge in reasoning to examine there the reality of things that be, *eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tēn alêtheian* (99e). He would in each case lay down a thought, *hupothemenos hekastotes logon*, which he judged firm enough, then whatever harmonized with that thought he would consider true, and whatever did not so harmonize he would consider not true (100a).

What Socrates says next is very revealing. When he tries to clarify what he means by seeking the real *en logoi* he says that there was nothing new in what he had just said; that it was what he had always said and what he had been saying in the earlier part of their conversation; that to explain the kind of causes he proposed, he would go back to his habitual discourse, and lay it down that there is a beautiful in itself, and a good, and a large, and all the rest (100b). It should be clear from this that the so-called method of hypothesis and the concept of the intelligible forms constitute an integral unity and are, at any rate for Socrates, inseparable.

Although Socrates seems to present his method of inquiry by means of 'hypotheses' as a second-best which he is driven to when he despairs of the quest for a method of explanation by the principles of intelligence and goodness, we will not go wrong if we suppose that to be no more than a literary gimmick. The method consists of two integrally related elements, a procedure and a principle. The procedure is to put forward a thought and examine its implications. The whole process involves nothing but ideas; and just that is the principle: all true 'knowledge' (philosophical knowledge, understanding) begins and ends in the mind and only in the mind. We know of no true *aitiai* apart from ideas. "I thought I should take refuge in *logoi* and there seek the reality (*alêtheia*) of things" (99c-e).

The *logos* and whatever seems to *sumphonein* with it (100a): this is the method of philosophy: no demonstrative proof, no syllogistic inference, except in an ancillary manner, and no extraneous evidence. This is the whole of philosophy as Socrates understood it and as, in my view, we should understand it. If we are misled by Plato's use of the term 'hypothesis' in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* into regarding the Socratic doctrine of forms (or even the Platonic 'theory') as a hypothesis as hypothesis is understood in the natural sciences we shall fail completely to understand the Socratic doctrine.

It should be clear from *Republic* 510c-d where Socrates speaks of hypothesizing the odd and the even and the three kinds of angles that when Plato speaks of making hypotheses, he means introducing concepts which, for the purpose in hand, are taken as self-evident. When we come to examine these, we need other concepts which are taken to be intelligible in themselves and accepted without question. Thus in all the higher reaches of thought, we always move from ideas, through ideas, to ideas in a self-sufficient system whose sole claim to validity is its intelligibility. There is no question of correspondence or agreement with anything outside the system of ideas. Thus when Socrates 'hypothesizes' the forms, he is not making a 'hypothesis' to be

verified or validated, but introducing a creative concept to be applied and developed. In the same way, when Spinoza prefaces his 'geometrically demonstrated' *Ethics* with his eight 'definitions', he is introducing creative concepts which are heavy with the whole substance of his philosophy, and he can then play the game of 'deducing' and 'demonstrating' all of his propositions because they are already inherent in the 'definitions'.

When Socrates takes as his hypothesis that each form is something, he does not, to my mind, mean that the form 'exists', but that the form is an intelligible *ousia*. For Socrates, each thing is or comes to be what it is by the form, by the power of the form. The reality of the form, the intelligibility of the form, makes the thing what it is. If we go on to amplify or articulate 'by the form' into 'by participating in', 'by partaking of', 'by the presence of', etc., as Plato does, all of this is only metaphor and parable and a manner of speaking, even if we tend sometimes (with Plato) to take our metaphor too literally, because the image is easier to grasp than the bare idea.

So when Socrates says for instance: *hêgoumetha ti ton thanaton einai*; (*Phaedo*, 64c), this cannot of course mean 'Do we believe that there is such a thing as death?' which would be banal unless taken in a specially sophisticated sense which is not intended at this point. The question properly taken means, 'We have a definite concept of death, don't we?' or 'Does not "death" have a definite meaning for us?' This should help us see that elsewhere when Socrates asks, for instance, 'Don't we say there is such a thing as justice?', this should not be taken to mean that the idea of justice 'exists' or is something but that we have an idea of justice, that justice has a meaning for us.

The Socratic Dialectic

In all of the so-called 'definition' dialogues we set out in quest of the meaning of a form. All of our attempts at definition are frustrated. We find again and again in trying to determine the character of a virtue or other ideal that we cannot determine its character in terms of anything extraneous to itself. The form is the final reality we have to rest with. In the *Hippias Major* we begin by asking: What is beauty? – not, what things are beautiful?, as Hippias understood the question, but what is that by which all beautiful things are beautiful? And we end by saying: By beauty all beautiful things are beautiful. And in the *Phaedo* Socrates explicitly and emphatically tells us that is the only possible and the

only philosophically viable answer. Those forms, those intelligibles, are the first principles of understanding.

That this is the lesson of the 'definition' dialogues, which never end in a definition, is spelled out as clearly as can be in the *Phaedo*: "It is apparent to me, that if there is anything beautiful other than the beautiful-itself, it is for no other reason beautiful than that it shares of that beauty. ... If anyone tells me that anything whatever is beautiful by having a delightful colour or shape or anything else of the kind, I take leave of all that (for I get lost with such things), telling myself simply and solely, and perhaps foolishly, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of beauty" (100c-d). This, in a nutshell, is the principle of Socratic ignorance.

Another recurrent feature of the early dialogues is that our attempt to determine the character of virtue or of any particular virtue, always leads to the identification of virtue with knowledge (*epistêmê*, *sophia*). But what knowledge? Knowledge of what? No particular knowledge is found to be satisfactory. All specific kinds of knowledge have to be discarded, transcended. So, in all the early dialogues, Socrates is positive about one thing: all search for the nature of virtue (human excellence) leads to knowledge, but we fail to have a firm grasp of the nature of that knowledge. We are left with only the knowing itself, the searching; we are left with the living, active intelligence, the active *nous*, whose reality is in the activity itself, the *phronêsis*. This is the profoundest meaning of Socratic ignorance.

Then we find a principle which Socrates never tired of reiterating or leading the conversation to: Nothing is good, in any sense of the word good, except when accompanied with reason. Nothing apart from intelligence is good in itself. All things apart from *nous*, *phronêsis*, are at best neutral. Intelligence is the source and ground of all good. But all particular instances of intelligence, intelligence actualized in any determinate circumstances, are relative and, under examination, can always be shown to have no finality or fixity. The exercise of intelligence itself, the active, creative, intelligence, is the only reality in which we can rest. This is the conclusion, the truth, the insight which the Socratic elenchus again and again points to even where it does not spell it out.

Book One of the *Republic* is widely regarded by scholars as having been written during the early period of Plato's work as a separate dialogue. In any case, in form and content it is similar to the early 'definition' dialogues. There we find Socrates leading the conversation with the aged Cephalus to the subject of justice. The old man having mentioned that wealth is most valuable to a good man in that it enables

him to render what he owes to gods and men, Socrates asks, can we take justice to mean simply giving back what one has received from another? Are there not circumstances in which that would not be right? When a man has received a weapon in trust from a friend when the friend was in his right mind; if the friend then goes mad, surely it would be wrong to give him back his weapon (330d-331c). Here we have a constant feature which we find in all of the 'definition' dialogues, a basic aspect of the Socratic elenchus. Whenever we try to capture the reality of a form in a determinate formula of words, we find that, however much we try to hem our formula with qualifications, distinctions, provisos, it is invariably found to be inadequate; once we give its terms a fixed meaning, we can draw unsatisfactory conclusions from it. It is in the very nature of objectified thought, as a determinate and therefore particular and finite expression, to be infested with contradictoriness. A meaningful statement has to be accepted in good faith as conveying a positive meaning. But any determinate formulation can be overturned by showing that, if we imbue it with finality and fixity, it can lead to unacceptable consequences. The recognition of this is one aspect of Socratic ignorance. And it is because of this that the philosophic life must be one of ceaseless probing; to rest in any definite formulation of Truth as definitive is to turn truth into superstition and philosophy into dogmatism.

Further on Socrates asks, Is it the part of a just man to harm any human being whatever? (335b). Polemarchus answers that one should harm one's enemies (335b). By a series of analyses we come to the view that by harming anything we make it worse in that which constitutes its essential nature. Also, it is not in the nature of any art or power to induce what is opposed to its proper excellence into any other thing. It is not in the nature of the just man to harm either friend or foe (335b-d). Perhaps we can see here more clearly than elsewhere that Socrates' arguments are never meant to demonstrate or to prove by strict logical process. They are evocations, aids to reflection that bring into play values and maxims that we accept as part of our heritage or as resonant with something ingrained in our nature. Those who seek to show the weakness or error of Plato's arguments relating to moral questions completely miss the point. Was there ever a philosopher who could prove demonstratively the correctness of moral principles? Could Aristotle? Could Spinoza? Could Kant? And who can name greater intellects than these? When Thrasymachus intervenes in the discussion, flatly rejecting the maxims and values which Socrates and Polemarchus had been assuming as common ground, the argument takes a different turn, but still there is no strict demonstration, and Thrasymachus, who

is not stupid in the least, is not convinced, any more than Calicles in the *Gorgias*.

The whole aim of the Socratic dialectic is not to establish demonstrable truth (something which, I maintain, is foreign to philosophical thinking) but to build up intelligibility; not to argue demonstratively, but to make our ideas harmonize in an intelligible whole. The end of philosophical thinking is not to attain truth, analytic or synthetic, but to affirm the intellectual integrity of the thinker.

In the *Republic* Socrates introduces the concept of the form of the Good, but when asked to articulate, he resorts to parable and speaks of the offspring of the Good, which is *nous*. That actually is the only reality (in the fullest and strictest sense) we know; and it is ineffable simply because it is not an object to be known but a reality to be lived. That is why Plato finds it impossible to convey the truths of philosophy in a written document (*Phaedrus*, 274-278, Epistle VII., 341c-d; cp. *Protagoras*, 347), because the truths of philosophy can only be beheld in the process of mutual examination or self-examination. When set in any fixed formulation, they are at best confessed myth and metaphor and at worst blind dogma and illusion. We find the philosopher's quest described as a striving towards grasping that which truly is by that in him which is most like that which is (*Republic*, 490a). This is sheer poetry and must necessarily be so. We find the same message in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. In the *Sophist* we are told that we are wholly in the dark about the nature of reality; that "reality is just as hard to define as unreality" (246a). Hard is hardly the word: reality is impossible to define; reality is just there, and all the philosopher can do is to take us by the hand and lead us to where we can behold reality, experience reality, by becoming ourselves as like reality as possible. This is the lesson of the *Republic*, of the *Symposium*, of the *Phaedo*, of the *Phaedrus*, and of the whole of Plato's work. Plato never had a final, a definitive, answer to any question. That is just what makes him the master of all philosophers, and that is just the lesson we stand most in need to learn from him.

All finite, determinate, actuality is imperfect. All imperfection entails contradiction. Determinate thought cannot escape contradictoriness. This is a principle implicit in the Socratic elenchus. The *Parmenides* spells it out clearly. Dialectic consists essentially in "doing away with or destroying (*anairein*) hypotheses" (*Republic*, 533c), because the 'hypotheses' (concepts, propositions) of philosophy, once formulated in a determinate way, become necessarily tainted with the contradictoriness inherent in attempting to express the perfect and the absolute in what cannot but be imperfect and relative. This is what I

mean by saying that all philosophical expression is essentially mythical. (See my *Let Us Philosophize*; "Philosophy as Prophecy", etc.)

Plato's 'theory'

Richard Kraut says that in the *Phaedo* "for the first time in Plato's writings we find a decisive declaration and argument that there exists a realm of objects utterly different from the ones with which we are familiar" (*The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, 1992, "Introduction to the study of Plato", p.7). T. H. Irwin, in the same work, tells us that "For Plato believes in the existence of a knowable mind-independent reality ..." ("The intellectual background", p.72). Does Plato argue for the existence of forms? Let me put aside the word 'existence' for the moment; I will come back to it later. Does Plato argue for the concept of forms? A concept calls for no proof and can have no proof. Socrates introduces the concept of the intelligible form, as a distinct dimension of being, distinct from the particular instances in which the form is embodied. The concept is not a fact or truth established by argument or proof, but is brought into being by a creative act. Does Plato argue for the separateness of the forms? The Socratic distinction of the intelligible and the sensible already sets up these two kinds of being as distinct realms. Does Plato argue for the separate 'existence' of the forms? In the *Phaedo* Plato argues for the separate existence of the soul, but I don't think he argues there expressly or intends to argue for the 'separate existence' of the forms. Plato maintains and emphasizes the Socratic distinction of *eidōs* (*idea*, *ousia*) on the one hand and the multiple particular instances on the other; but all that Plato says about where those forms reside, is myth freely owned as such; all he says about how we come by them is a likely tale; all he says about how they are related to the particular instances is tentative groping for a satisfactory formulation: Nothing makes beautiful things beautiful other than *parousia* or *koinōnia* of the beautiful, or however it may be called; "for I do not affirm that positively, but only that by beauty all beautiful things become beautiful" (*Phaedo*, 100d). For the relation of the forms to the sensible particulars, Plato uses the terms *parousia*, *koinōnia*, *methexis*, and the verbs *katechein*, *dechesthai*, *metechein*, quite indifferently. It seems to me that it is because philosophers overlook the role of myth in philosophy and because they have not absorbed the basic lesson of the

dialogues – that philosophical thinking cannot rest in any definitive formulation – that they can fall victim to such gross misunderstanding.

Let us have a look at the arguments of the *Phaedo*. Sight and hearing, the clearest of our senses, do not give us accurate or reliable perceptions (65a-b). They cannot be the source of our ideas, which are clear and incontestable. When does the mind (*psuchê*) grasp reality (*alêtheia*)? It is not when it relies on the body but when it reasons (*logizesthai*) that it finds reality (*ti tôn ontôn*) (65b-c). (We should note here the equivalence of *alêtheia* and *ti tôn ontôn*.) Do we say there is a just in itself, *ti einai dikaion auto*, and a beautiful (*kalon*, fine), and a good (*agathon*)? Have we ever seen any of these with our eyes? Nor did we perceive them by any other of our senses (65d). Also largeness, health, strength — all such characters that be, *hapantôn tês ousias tugchanei hekaston on*, are thought, not seen or otherwise perceived through the bodily senses.

These are not arguments for separate existence but rather a distinguishing of two modes of being, a sensible, inconstant matter on the one hand and an intelligible, constant form on the other. The form is there, is meaningful. It is natural to speak of it as existing until we find that way of speaking fraught with problems. But whatever we mean by speaking of the existence of the form, to make it into an object destroys its special character, its distinctness from what is given in experience. (See my "On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine's 'On What There Is'" and "Where Is I?: An examination of Gilbert Ryle's 'Courses of Action or the Uncatchableness of Mental Acts'".)

We have the notion of equality. We understand what it means. There are many particular things – sticks and stones – which we call equal. Socrates is positive that these particulars may be the occasion but are never the source of the idea. Plato says that our idea of (absolute) equality cannot be derived from perceptibles, which are never constant, nor from our perceptions, which are never certain. Do not equal stones and equal sticks sometimes appear equal to one person and unequal to another? (*Phaedo*, 74a-c). When Plato thus speaks of the imperfection of the many on the ground that a particular thing can appear both equal and unequal, both beautiful and ugly or both just and unjust, he is referring to the imperfection inherent in all determinate existence, which can only be relative to a determinate setting and determinate circumstances. This is just what Socrates had been showing in all of his examinings, as shown in all the 'definition' dialogues. The argument, whatever we may think of it from a logical standpoint, is not there to prove the separateness of the idea and the things, but to clarify the radical difference in nature between the

sensible and the intelligible. The distinction of the intelligible and the sensible and the doctrine of the subjective (to avoid the suspect word 'mental') origin of the *eidos* are inseparable. And the argument – like all philosophical argument – does not prove the truth of a proposition but introduces a concept. Hence I think we miss the point of philosophical argument and mistake the nature of philosophical thinking when we seek to show the logical insufficiency of such an argument. The purpose of the argument is to put through a truth which Plato already holds. Is this not the purpose of all philosophical argument? There are certain fields of human knowledge – mathematics, natural science, forensics, etc. – where demonstration and proof have different specific roles to play; but in all other areas, the purpose of argument is never to prove, least of all to the person putting forward the argument, but to clarify an idea. Modern scholars must have recourse to contortuous arguments to prove Plato right or wrong in his reasoning because they seek to force Plato's view, which is a creative vision, into the solid mould of a logic that is not capable of encompassing the vision.

The character, the essence, of which we give account, which is the object of reasoning, is ever the same, and that is what is, what is real, what has being (*Phaedo*, 78c-d). And what does it mean to say that it is ever the same, unchangeable? The reality of the intelligible is nothing but its intelligibility; its intelligibility is its reality. Plato's poetry shrouds the Socratic insight in a mystic haze. The mystery and the poetry are consonant with the insight until we try to impose on them a fixity and a literalness that was not meant for them.

When in the *Phaedo* we are told that in the higher reaches of thought, in reasoning, the soul (mind) is independent of the body, not relatively but absolutely, that does not refer in the first place to the separation of soul and body (even though Plato was there arguing for such separation), but to the profounder truth that such thinking takes place on a plane of being that is qualitatively different from the bodily.

Then we have two modes of being, the visible and the invisible (*duo eidê tôn ontôn, to men horaton, ta de aides*). The invisible constantly preserving its character (since it is nothing but essence and character) and the invisible always changeable (79a). (We may note here another example of Plato's distrust of fixed terminology, for certainly he would not allow the visible to be part of *ton ontôn* in the strict sense.) The forms and the sensible particulars belong to two distinct worlds; they are not separate members of the same world. The word 'exist' cannot have the same meaning when applied to these two. If the particulars exist, then it is not right to speak of the forms as existing; if the forms

are real, then the particulars cannot be real in the same sense. Hence I think that the radical distinction I draw between existence and reality (See my *Let Us Philosophize*, especially Bk. II., ch. 2) may help to lessen somewhat the confusion consequent upon Plato's distrust of fixed terminology without departing from the essence of the Socratic-Platonic position.

To say that whenever we apply one name to numerous particular things there must be a single form of which the many particulars partake is not to prove the existence of forms but to create the concept of an intelligible order by virtue of which the many particulars become meaningful — a concept thanks to which the mind becomes aware of its own reality and its own power. Likewise, when we say that knowledge can only be of the unchangeable, we are not proving the existence of the unchangeable, but introducing the distinction between the mutable perceptible world and the constant intelligible world, even though the constancy of the intelligible world may be no more than a fictitious constancy cast by the mind over the flux of the actual world.

Scholars have been side-tracked by Plato's poetry. It is not correct to speak of Plato's 'belief in forms', as many scholars do, as if one could believe in forms just as one believes or does not believe in ghosts. One either has or does not have the concept of forms, and most modern scholars simply don't have it. They operate without the concept of forms, of the intelligible realm, and their world is so much the poorer. It is wrong to speak of the forms as objects. Even if we shared Plato's dream of a Heaven of Forms, still we would have to think of their nature not as objects but as intelligibles — that is why I find the term 'ideas' not inappropriate, provided that we take it with circumspection.

What is essential for the philosophical life is not to know or to admit the 'existence' of the forms — a position which Plato never distinctly formulated —, but to know the forms and live with the forms by leading a life of reason and contemplation. To live an appropriately human life is to live intelligently, and to live intelligently is to question all givenness. Any given that remains simply given is a constraint on intelligence. That is the rationale of Socrates' lifelong mission of self-examination and the examination of others, and that is the essence of Socratic ignorance: no determinate knowledge can be accepted as final. In offering this interpretation I know that I am making a tall claim. My hope is that the following pages will make this claim appear to be not so tall.

Shall we say that a form is an entity? What could we mean by that? We can widen or narrow the scope of the term 'entity'. Of course anything we can speak of is a thing we speak of; it is a mentionable.

But if we mean by entity something in addition to that, we should be clear as to what we mean. Material things exist: we are supposed to know what that means. But what do we mean by the existence of an idea? An idea that exists somehow in my brain is no idea; it is something else. An idea, as an idea, can only be in my mind, not in my brain. It is not just a word or just a sound; it is a meaning, a moment of active intelligence. It is intelligence that is real, that is the whole of reality, and the idea is real as a moment of that reality. Modern philosophers ask about the sort of being that is to be ascribed to the referents of universals. To my mind, the question is flawed. It speaks of the universal, the referent of the universal, and of the being of the referent. In truth the universal is the referent and it is its own being. To use language at all, to think, we have to break up what is one. To gain understanding we have to go back to the one. Once again we are led back to the great insight of Socrates: it is only in the simple idea (*eidos, ousia*), that we find reality.

The Socratic distinction of the intelligible and the sensible does not mean the existence of the forms separately from sensible objects: to affirm that is to place the forms and the objects on the same plane of being, to make the forms just 'more of the same', and thus to negate the distinction. The Socratic distinction refers to two dimensions of being, as different from each other as space and time are. Plato never allows his special vision of a celestial world of forms to cloud the original distinction of the intelligible and the sensible.

The heavenly abode of the forms in the *Phaedrus* is sheer poetry. Plato never even so much as hinted it could be anything but that. The ascent to the form of beauty in the *Symposium* is not an ascent in space. The ascent is achieved and the vision is realized wholly in the mind. Likewise in the *Republic* the progression to the Form of the Good is a wholly spiritual journey.

Among moderns there have been those who maintain that propositions exist as ideal objects. This claim rests on the same ground, and seeks to do justice to the same insight, as the Platonic doctrine of the 'existence' of forms. A proposition embodies a thought in a determinate formulation of language. The proposition does not exhaust the thought. Not only can the thought be expressed in different languages, but, in one and the same language, can give rise to an infinite variety of versions. As the thinker seeks to clothe the thought in words, s/he experiences the genesis of the linguistic formula from the thought. This, in my view, points to the reality of the thought, a reality that transcends all its actualizations in a determinate expression. This, I think, is the truth that those who maintain that propositions exist as

ideal objects mean to affirm. But I think that both the words 'exist' and 'objects' in this statement are unfortunate. The expression or statement (let us put aside for the moment the term 'proposition' which has a foot in either world) only exists as a determinate, particular, embodied thing. The thought, according to my usage, neither exists nor is an object, but is a reality, a living reality, that has its being in a living, creative mind. What about the mind? Does the mind 'exist'? Where mind is opposed to body, both mind and body are abstractions, mere fictions. Neither is viable in separation. Only the whole has being, and within that whole I speak of the body as existent and of the mind as real. In abstraction the mind is real but does not exist, the body exists but is not real. This is only my idiotic terminology and my idiotic language (hopefully the reader may take the adjective in the original sense of the Greek word), but I believe that it gives voice to something meaningful.

Plato's 'Self-Criticism'

It is widely held, both by scholars who ascribe the 'theory of forms' to Socrates and those who regard it as an innovation of Plato's middle period, that the first part of the *Parmenides* is a criticism of the theory, which Plato thereafter abandons. This view, to my mind, is unjustified. The first part of the *Parmenides* brings to the fore and examines the difficulties surrounding Plato's formulation of the relation of the perceptible many to the unique intelligible form, difficulties to which Plato had never been insensible. And the criticism concludes with a clear affirmation of the necessity of the intelligible forms for all discourse.

The discussion in the first part of the *Parmenides* (128e-135c) does not concern itself with the fundamental concept of *ideai*, but with the special problem of the relation between the *ideai* and the many particular instances in which they are represented. I tend to think that Socrates was content to say that particular things (the many mutable existents) receive their intelligible characters from the ideas engendered in the mind. He may have spoken loosely of the participation of the perceptible things in the form. It was Plato who raised the problem of the manner of that participation, and to the end of his life did not settle on a satisfactory answer. Why? Because this is just one of those puzzles that theoretical thinking creates for itself and that can never have a definitive solution, simply because it begins by separating what is inseparable. The intelligible is a whole; its wholeness is its reality. To

speak of its intelligibility as one thing and of its being as another is fine: that is how theoretical understanding works, by creating fictitious distinctions. But once we try to impose finality on those distinctions, we find ourselves in a literally endless maze. This is the core lesson of the *Parmenides*, as I try to show in the chapter devoted to that dialogue.

The discussion begins with Zeno reading his book which seeks to prove that the assumption of a multiplicity of existents necessarily leads to contradictions. Socrates asks him to re-read the first argument which says that the many cannot help being similar and not similar at the same time. Socrates suggests that if we admit the form of the similar in itself and, in opposition to it, the form of the dissimilar in itself, then there would be no problem in regarding particular things as partaking of similarity and dissimilarity at the same time. There is nothing uncanny in the mixture. He would only be surprised if the forms themselves were found to be mixed (127d-130a). (In the *Sophist* we find the problem of the blending of the forms dealt with at length, which shows that Plato never ceased to work on various aspects of the problem of participation.)

Here Parmenides interposes. He asks Socrates if he himself has drawn the distinction, on the one side (*chôris men*) the forms, on the other side (*chôris de*) the things that partake of them; does he think there is a similarity apart from the similarity in us? (130b). Any 'separation' here is smuggled in by the necessities of language. The 'separation', if we must use the word, is logical not physical. There is, essentially, no question of separate 'existence', however much Plato, with his mystical and poetical temperament, may have delighted in giving the forms a celestial abode. If we must assign the forms a 'place', that 'place' can be none but the mind. I will surely be accused of foisting on Plato my own views. I will admit to clothing Plato's thought in my own language, but I maintain that, in doing so, I am not distorting what is at the core of that thought.

Parmenides goes on to inquire of Socrates about what he thinks there are forms of. Of the just and the beautiful and the good? Certainly. Of man and fire and water? Socrates is hesitant. Of hair, mud, and dirt? Socrates recoils and Parmenides admonishes him: You are still young, Socrates, and philosophy has not yet taken a firm hold of you; otherwise, you would not despise such things (130b-e). That is not to be taken as 'a piece of polite irony' as Taylor would have us do (*Plato: the Man and his Work*, 1926, p.351), but should be taken to mean that, if forms bred in the mind are the source of all intelligibility, then we must admit forms of all things that can be cognized and can become the subject of discourse. This may have represented a problem

for Plato. On the one hand he saw that the 'theory' demanded that there should be forms of the meanest of things (so in the *Republic* at 596a we have forms for bed and table, *klinê*, *trapeza*); on the other hand he was sentimentally attached to forms as exalted ideals. When we realize that the reality of the forms resides in the creativity of our intelligence, the problem disappears: our mind is the source and the ground of all intelligibility: the intelligibility of the most perfect and most real and likewise the intelligibility of that which is shot through and through with mutability and unreality.

Parmenides next goes on to raise a series of logical difficulties involved in the idea of participation as an attempt to articulate the relation between the many particular instances and the unique form. The difficulties are all such as can be and will be involved in any theoretical formulation whatever. Such logical objections, when raised against a creative idea or a view based on true insight, never overthrow the essence but only reveal the necessary imperfection of any determinate formulation of thought. Our academics should know that when they are busy at each other's throats, they are only compounding their blindness; if they were true dialecticians they would understand that the function of genuine criticism is to lead to more and more profound insight into the view criticized.

At one point Parmenides introduces an argument that has had a highly vibrant life of its own, even varying its character in the process. I will comment on this argument at some length here, though not as fully as I hope to do elsewhere. When we see a number of things which look alike large, we say they share a single character (*idea*), largeness. Now, this largeness itself and those particular large things, don't they call for yet a further largeness in which they share? We thus seem launched on an infinite regress (132a-b). This argument or problem has bred a progeny of variants that have been variously named: Third Man, indefinite or infinite regress, and, lately, the problem of self-predication. Fundamentally, it is one with the problem that gave rise to Russell's paradox. Although these variants differ in their logical structure, I do not find it necessary for my purpose to distinguish them: I have one answer for the lot.

The problem is a pseudo-problem. A character may, in a manner of speaking, be said to have its character; the problem arises when that is taken to mean that we can separate the character of a character from its being. It is true that we sometimes find in the dialogues such loose statements as 'the form of piety must surely be pious'. If we relax our linguistic rules a little, there is a sense in which we can say this truthfully. But Plato was not simple enough not to see that 'largeness is

large' is nonsensical. And it is the essence of Socrates' position that an idea does not derive its character from anything beyond the idea. The idea is its own reality. That is the meaning of the Socratic dictum: 'It is by beauty that beautiful things are beautiful.' We do not need a theory of participation to justify or explain this insight. The moment we regard the idea (largeness) as one thing, and its character (being large) as another, we have all kinds of trouble. That is the root of Russell's famous Paradox, and the solution Russell proposed, the Theory of Types, is nothing but the recognition that at some point (according to Socrates, at all points) we have to say 'That's just that!' We have to rest with the idea. Because Russell did not go as far as Socrates, his solution was only a half-way house and continues to breed other paradoxes. Now, if Plato saw through the argument, as *Republic* 597c clearly shows, why did he not clear up the muddle here? Because Plato was not in the business of giving solutions but of provoking thought. Time and again in the dialogues he raises a problem, introduces an objection, or stealthily slips in a fallacy, leaving his readers to exercise their minds on them.

Then comes a turn in the argument which it may be thought incumbent on me to address since it seems to be explicitly arrayed against the position I am defending. Yet perhaps I don't really have to say much here, since the objection raised is one I have been responding to throughout this essay.

Socrates suggests: May not a form be an intelligible (*noêma*) which may not be said to be located (*engenesthai*) anywhere but in the mind (*en psuchais*)? Parmenides objects that a thought has to be a thought of something. Once this is admitted, anyone with a rudiment of logic can wreak havoc (132b-c). The error is in splitting the thought, which is a whole, into the thought and that of which the thought is a thought. When we think of beauty or of red, we do not have in each case two things, our thought and that of which our thought is a thought, but (in each case) one thing, the thought beauty or the thought red. The view advanced here need not be identified with nominalism or conceptualism as proposed by Taylor (*Plato: the Man and his Work*, 1926, p.357), at least not 'nominalism' as commonly understood. The fault of nominalism is not in taking forms to be thoughts, but in regarding them solely as tools of the mind, (Quine, if I understand him, does not concede them even that), failing to observe that they are the very life of the mind. For Aristotle ideas are thoughts in the mind, but they are borrowed by the mind from the 'outside' world. For Socrates the important consideration is that ideas are generated in the mind and give the outside world what meaning it has. This is neither the realism nor

the nominalism of the infamous controversy. If we must 'ismatize' it, it is idealism, but I abhor all isms.

There are those who side with Parmenides' objection here because they think that, to establish or preserve the 'objectivity' of values, we cannot admit our ideals to be 'mere thoughts' in the mind; they have to refer to 'objective realities'. But if we hold, as I do, that our mind, our intelligence, is the sole reality of which we are immediately cognizant, then our ideals would be firmly anchored in that prime reality, even though those specific ideals are necessarily tainted with the relativity and mutability of all determinate actuality, all finite being. This is the gist of my answer to the problem of the relative and the absolute in morality. All determinate moral principles and moral maxims are relative: there is nothing absolutely absolute in human life. But they are grounded in the absolute inasmuch as they reflect, express and actualize the integrity of intelligence. There is not a rule a good person may not break, but to be good a person has always to be subject to a rule. I think this is the insight Kant's categorical imperative gave expression to; but Kant thought we could give definitive formulation to the rule a good person has to be subject to, while I maintain that this is not possible. (I develop this line of thought in "Must Values Be Objective?" and in "Free Will as Creativity".)

After this over-lengthy digression I will not stop to discuss the remaining arguments of Parmenides in the first part of the dialogue. Suffice it to say that they all address formulations of the relations of the things to the forms or of the manner of the 'existence' of the forms, which Plato may have considered at one time or another but all of which he, obviously, found unsatisfactory.

To leave us under no illusion that all of this is meant as a criticism of the core concept of intelligible forms, Plato makes Parmenides conclude this part of the discussion by remarking that if, on the basis of such arguments, we refuse to admit forms to be realities (*eidê tôn ontôn einai*), then reason (*dianoia*, thought) would have no refuge; we would thereby destroy the possibility of discourse (135b-c).

The essence of the Socratic conception of forms is that when any particular thing has a name or character, it has that name or character in virtue of there being in the mind a form under which that particular thing becomes intelligible. That is the reality of the form, as a principle of intelligibility. The reality of the forms is the reality of the active, creative intelligence which breeds the forms. Plato, poet, lover, dreamer, liked to house the sublimest of those forms in a heaven of their own. That was all right as poetry: it is one of the most precious items of our spiritual heritage. But taken literally, that made the forms

into things, and opened the way for the grosser doctrines of the 'friends of the forms', against which Aristotle set up his universals, and so we were landed in the interminable controversy between realism and nominalism (and the half-way-house conceptualism) which continues to rage to this day.

The forms in Plato's latest works

Those scholars who think the *Parmenides* shows Plato having second thoughts about the doctrine of forms hold that the doctrine does not appear in the works of the third period. In what follows I will try to show that an unprejudiced reading of the latest of Plato's works reveals that, though late in life Plato's interests were shifting and new problems were engaging his attention, yet he never abandoned his basic Socratic convictions.

Plato's philosophy enthrones philosophical idealism, which was heralded by Parmenides' "It is the same thing to be intelligible and to be" *tauto gar esti noein te kai einai*, or, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*. Thereafter all radical philosophical debate has been an episode of what Plato has dramatically characterized in the *Sophist* as the Battle of Gods and Giants.

In the *Sophist* Plato employs the designation Friends of the Forms to refer broadly to thinkers who find reality in the intelligible realm. There has been controversy among scholars as to just who the Friends of Forms were, a controversy compounded by Aristotle's use of the same designation. I think we need not take the appellation in Aristotle to be strictly identical to that in the *Sophist*. In any case, whoever the Friends of Forms were, Plato ranges them among 'the Gods', and they obviously have his full sympathy. Plato was probably alluding to members of the Academy whose understanding of the doctrine was too rigid and Aristotle may have been referring to members whose views had solidified even further.

We learn that the Friends of Forms make distinction between becoming and real being and speak of them as separate. We have intercourse with becoming by means of the body and with real being by means of the soul through reflection (*Sophist*, 248a). The criticism that follows this (248b-249d) does not contradict or reverse the Socratic position – the intelligible is the real –, but corrects the imbalance in Plato's middle-period emphasis on the permanence and changelessness of forms, an emphasis which some followers may have adopted unreservedly. He has come to realize that there must be room for life

and active intelligence in our conception of reality. For Socrates the forms were always functions of the mind. Plato in his mystic fervour dreamed of a heaven of timeless forms. Now he comes to realize that life and active intelligence are the more basic concepts. Of course the view that that which is perfectly real must have life and intelligence had always been at the heart of Plato's philosophical outlook, but his earlier theoretical formulations did not give that view adequate expression.

In the *Timaeus* Plato is toying with the construction of a cosmogony. In that respect it is akin to its many predecessors, on which Socrates turned his back. But the forms are at the foundation of the whole scheme. The sentence at 48e, "We distinguished earlier two forms (*eidê*), now we need a third kind (*genos*)" may be of disputable significance. But when Plato goes on to say that we had introduced "on the one hand one prototype form (*eidos*), intelligible and constant, and on the other hand a copy of the prototype, subject to becoming and visible" (48e-49a), we can hardly be wrong in taking this as an expression of the Socratic distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, which is the backbone of the doctrine of forms.

The 'third form' introduced at this point by Plato, the receptacle, *geneseôs hupodochên*, does not entail any radical departure in the doctrine. Plato used to speak of the sensible as the many; now in the framework of a cosmogony he needs to cast the many in some unified mould. The *hupodochê* is existence as opposed to reality, is the given as opposed to the creatively determined, is Aristotle's matter (*hulê*), is the many seen in the totality of the cosmos.

In 49a-50a where Plato maintains that the changeable should not be spoken of as being a thing but as having a quality, not as 'this' but as 'such', we have a sure reaffirmation of the *Phaedo* doctrine that the sensible, the many mutable things, have no reality in themselves but borrow their reality from the forms. Whether Socrates had paid any attention to this aspect of the doctrine or not, it is fully in harmony with his basic conception of the intelligible realm as the abode of all reality.

Even though Plato, in his never-ending search for formulations that might take us a step forward, seems to speak of the *hupodochê* as the constant thing, we find him soon explicitly reaffirming that the mutable particulars which go in and out of it (which in fact constitute its actual existence) are copies of eternal realities *ta de eisionta kai exionta tôn ontôn aei mimêmata* (50c). In the end we find the *hupodochê* to be "invisible and formless, all-embracing, sharing in a mysterious manner of the intelligible", *anoraton eidos ti kai amorphon, pandeches, metalambanon de aporôtata pêi tou noêtou* (51a-b).

After all I have said I cannot do better than quote the following lines without comment. They speak for themselves. "Is there such a thing as 'fire in itself', and do all these other realities of which we use this phrase 'so-and-so in itself' exist? Or are the things we see and perceive by our other senses the only true realities? Is there nothing besides them and are we talking nonsense when we say there are intelligible forms of particular things? If intelligence and true opinion are different in kind, then these 'things in themselves' certainly exist, forms imperceptible to the senses, but apprehended by thought ..." (51b7-d5, tr. Desmond Lee). There is not a thought here that could not have been affirmed in the very same words by Socrates. (I have my reservations as to the word 'exist' in Lee's translation.)

At *Theaetetus* 145d Socrates says, *sophiai de g' oimai sophoi hoi sophoi*. In its present context this sentence can easily be taken in a trivial sense. But had Plato dropped the so-called 'theory of forms' as many scholars argue, he could not have written this sentence without being uncomfortably reminded of the Socratic 'foolish' 'It is by Beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful'. Had Plato discarded the forms he would have been careful at this point to avoid this form of words.

In the *Laws* Plato is for the most part concerned with practical legislation. When he comes to ground his legislative proposals on ultimate reality, we find Clinias saying that the legislator "should defend the claim of law itself and of art to be natural, or no less real than nature, seeing that they are the product of mind by a sound argument" (890d, tr. A. E. Taylor). We should remember that 'natural' for Plato does not mean pertaining to the phenomenal world, but to the world of reality. Further on we find that our guardians should be able to attend not only to the many, but move on to the knowledge of the one; and when it comes to the fine and the good, our guardians should not merely know the many instances, but must know the one (965b-966a).

The concluding pages of the *Laws* show clearly the error of those who think that Plato discarded the forms in his late period. Further, 965c9-e5 shows that he was still struggling with the problem of the unity of virtues examined in the *Protagoras* — further evidence, to my mind, that the problems of philosophy are not problems amenable to definitive solutions. They are living problems, a living fire that keeps the mind alive.

Today our learned scholars and our near-illiterate populace alike can see at a glance that Plato's cosmology and Plato's theology are sheer myth. To stop at that is to miss what is most important, a fault in which the most learned and the most ignorant of our contemporaries share equally. For the heart that throbs in Plato's myth pulsates with living

truth, giving voice to the insight that it is the intelligible realm that is the abode of reality and that it is in the spiritual life that we are most in communion with reality.

Aristotle's criticism

In my opinion – and I know it will bring hell down on me –, Aristotle completely misunderstood Plato and has been the source of the commonly accepted erroneous views regarding the Socratic-Platonic 'doctrine of Ideas'. In nearly all that he writes about Plato he shows a complete failure to understand the spirit and essence of Plato's thinking, because his approach to philosophy is radically different from Plato's. Aristotle destroyed the poetry in philosophy, and by destroying the poetry killed the very soul of philosophy. Since in this essay I have been addressing those same misunderstandings and erroneous views, I will not here enter into any detailed examination of Aristotle's treatment of Plato. I content myself here with the following sampling.

In *Metaphysica* I.9 we read: "In general, though philosophy seeks the cause of perceptible things, we have given this up (for we say nothing of the cause from which change takes its start), but while we fancy we are stating the substance of perceptible things, we assert the existence of a second class of substances, while our account of the way in which they are the substances of perceptible things is empty talk; for 'sharing', as we said before, means nothing." (992a, tr. W. D. Ross.) This completely misses the essence of the Socratic-Platonic conception of forms as cause not of the existence but of the intelligibility of things, which agrees with Socrates' express renunciation of any quest for the causes of perceptible things. Plato in the *Timaeus* may have toyed with the idea of the forms as prototypes, but even there they are not meant to be causes in Aristotle's sense of the word.

"And so Plato was not far wrong when he said that there are as many Forms as there are kinds of natural objects (if there *are* Forms distinct from the things of this earth)" (*Metaphysica*, XII.3, 1070a, tr. W. D. Ross). Again Aristotle disregards the conception of form as intelligible character, concentrating instead on the idea of form as an existent entity.

In *Ethica Nicomachea* we read, "Now some thought that apart from these many goods there is another which is self-subsistent and causes the goodness of all these as well" (I.4 1095a, tr. W. D. Ross). Again and again Aristotle insists on taking the forms as causes in a sense that neither Socrates nor Plato intended. And while Plato's greatest gift to

philosophy was the realization that the profoundest truths of philosophy can only be conveyed in myth and metaphor, Aristotle, by treating the myth as factual, smothers the profound insight.

Plato's *universalia ante rem* (may Plato forgive us for making him speak a barbaric tongue) were sheer metaphor and poetry and a flight into mysticism. The poetry and the mysticism shone with the light of great insight, but he never forced the insight into the rigid mould of a finished theory. Aristotle's *universalia in re* are logical classes, very useful but, bereft of poetry and mysticism, they keep our eyes riveted to the nether world.

Unfortunately, most moderns approach Plato's philosophy in general, and the concept of forms in particular, with Aristotelian lenses on their eyes. In consequence, they misread everything Plato says. To understand the Socratic-Platonic doctrine of forms, we have to rid ourselves of the accretions and associations that have gathered around the so-called problem of universals, from Aristotle through Augustine and the Scholastics down to Quine and Putnam and their followers. We cannot have a true view of the pristine doctrine by peeping through that jungle.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RATIONALITY OF SOCRATES' MORAL PHILOSOPHY

I

IT IS COMMON TO CHARACTERIZE the moral philosophy of Socrates as consisting of a collection of paradoxes: the unity of all virtue; the identity of virtue and knowledge; the maxim that it is better to suffer wrong than commit wrong; and the topmost paradox, that no one does wrong voluntarily. The man is accorded in the philosophy books the outward deference due to his time-honoured name, but his views are dismissed with a shrug of the shoulder: Socrates could hold these views because he was enough of a simpleton not to know that the human person is made up of so many disparate faculties and powers and drives; Plato was to teach us that and all subsequent philosophy was to consolidate it and fix it: who today is so stupid as not to know that the intellect and the will are worlds apart, not to speak of the Hades-deep dark caves of the subconscious and the unconscious? Yet I believe that in the early dialogues of Plato – which can be safely regarded as giving a truthful account of Socrates' thought – we have a coherent and highly defensible moral philosophy which stands whole and entire, and which the middle-period and later dialogues neither alter nor add to.

Let me first be clear as to what I intend by the term rationality. I begin by stating what I do not mean by the term: I do not mean demonstrability. I maintain that principles and values are not amenable to proof or verification. So what do I mean by rationality? A theoretical position or mental attitude is rational when it is consistently and coherently developed out of a basic concept or set of related concepts. On this understanding of rationality, I maintain that Socrates' moral philosophy is eminently rational. Conformably with my stated criterion of rationality, it is obvious that I should begin by indicating the basic concept or set of concepts out of which that philosophy is developed.

In the Greek language (and a language is the incarnate genius of a people) the *aretê* of a thing is its peculiar character. And if we conjoin to this the view (natural to a zestful, nature-loving, life-affirming people) that all being is valuable, we find the conception easily and consistently translatable into: the *aretê* of a thing is its peculiar *excellence*. Socrates did not have to invent this idea; it was an integral part of his cultural heritage.

What Socrates contributed, the basic concept which is the germinal seed of all of his thought, is the idea that what constitutes the distinguishing character and special excellence of a human being is what Socrates mostly refers to simply as that in us which is benefited by doing what is right and harmed by doing what is wrong. In the dialogues Plato identifies that as the *psuchê* (soul), but I think we gain a clearer understanding of Socrates' thought if we identify it as *nous* or *phronêsis* (intelligence): not abstract thought or reasoning, but active reason, reason in action, and this is simply virtue in the fullest and best sense. It is this whole, this human essence of ours, that is that in us which is enhanced and enriched by doing what is right and harmed by doing what is wrong.

Once we see virtue as the well-being of our inmost essence, it becomes absurd to ask for a justification for virtue. Most of us would agree that, with a diseased body, life is not worth living. Can it be worthwhile to live when that which gives us our proper worth is diseased? What matters most to a person of real worth is not just to live, but to live the life proper to a human being. If that is so, is it any wonder that we find virtue and intelligence identical? that we find all virtues united? that we find it axiomatic that no one would knowingly harm that which is her or his most precious property?

Just as Socrates did not separate soul and body, or in any case did not lay much emphasis on the separation as Plato was sometimes to do, he likewise did not break up the soul into separate faculties. For him the experience of knowing the right thing and doing the wrong is not a conflict between parts of the soul, but a failure of the whole soul, the whole person, to be clear as to her/his aims and scale of values. The will cannot be separated from the intellect. It is the whole person that acts. It may be that in the practice of education we find it necessary to speak of disciplining the will as well as the intellect. This is so only because a human being comprises various planes of being and does not always live at the highest plane of his being. But for a human being living up to her/his title, to do what is right is inseparable from knowing what is right. (This is the much-discussed problem of *akrasia*

which I examine at various points in what follows, particularly in ch. 4, "The *Protagoras*".)

Admittedly, Socrates' doctrine of the identity of virtue and understanding does not hold water as a psychology of human behaviour; but it was never intended as such. Socrates was not concerned to find out or observe or describe or explain how people behave under normal or actual conditions (all of which are legitimate pursuits for the scientist). Socrates' only concern was to reveal how people would behave if and when they realize in themselves the perfection of their proper nature as rational beings and to inspire in them the aspiration to realize that perfection. When Socrates affirms that no one does wrong willingly, he is asserting that anyone who does wrong is acting with an impaired will, an impaired understanding and impaired freedom. Will and understanding and freedom, in the true sense, together with all virtues and all ideals, are aspects and dimensions of one whole, one single perfection. Where we think that we have any of these in separation, proper examination shows that the specimen we have is a fake or at best a poor imitation of the reality. This is the lesson of the Socratic elenchus, where we begin by seeking the nature of a particular virtue, only to find it turning, Proteus-like, into another and another and in the end find it slipping through our fingers. This is also the lesson of such a dialogue as the *Hippias Minor* where Socrates leads Hippias to the paradoxical conclusion that he who voluntarily does wrong and disgraceful things can be no other than the good man: the real lesson being that this can never be the case. It is only when and in so far as our personality remains fragmented that our desire and our judgement do not run hand in hand. When our personality is properly integrated, we cannot desire anything that we judge bad, and we cannot judge anything good without desiring it. Socrates' paradox loses its paradoxicality when applied to the ideally intelligent person.

When we see Socrates as a simpleton and find his moral philosophy a cluster of paradoxes, we are judging him by our presuppositions, by our commonly accepted values. The man deserves that we view his position in the light of his principles. Socrates was aware that his position was far removed from what was commonly accepted and regarded as obvious and realistic. Thus having affirmed that 'we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him', he goes on to say, 'this opinion has never been held, and never will be held, by any considerable number of persons; and those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point

have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ' (*Crito*, 49c-d, tr. Jowett).

When Crito says to Socrates that the opinion of the many has to be taken into account because they can do the greatest evil to anyone who is not in favour with them, Socrates answers, 'I only wish it were so, Crito, and that the many could do the greatest evil; for then they would also be able to do the greatest good.' Will is a power whole and indivisible and it is one with intelligent activity. Those who do wrong – as Spinoza would teach – do not act but agitate under passion. They are not free because their 'action' is extraneously determined. We do not need a clever equation using sophisticated notation to 'prove' this position. Such an equation can only show that a certain formal conclusion may be derived from a certain formal concept that can nevertheless always be so refined as to show that the conclusion is inconsistent with the concept. Socrates does not give us a formula: Socrates gives us a living idea that can never be circumscribed by any determinate formulation.

In the *Gorgias*, Callicles refuses to admit that 'doing wrong is baser than suffering wrong'. Socrates could not prove to him that it was so — ideals and values are not amenable to proof. Socrates could only do what Callicles rightly charges him with doing: foist upon his audience a 'popular' notion. That is what all moral teaching is about. Again Callicles was, in a sense, right in maintaining that Socrates' notion has its foundation in convention and not in nature. There is a primitive goodness in our nature, but it is a goodness that we share with all living things, perhaps with all being; but this is not the goodness peculiar to us as human beings — that goodness is the product of ideals we create and freely embrace.

Being essentially intelligent beings, we live our characteristically human life, the only true life we have, in a world peopled with the ideas and ideals engendered by our intelligence. To understand the true nature of these ideas and ideals is to know ourselves, to be ourselves, and realize our special excellence as human beings. Notwithstanding all the logical criticism, analysis, and argument in the dialogues, if we probe deep enough we will find that Socrates does not argue for any of his maxims or principles. As Socrates says repeatedly, his real purpose was not to examine this or that statement or theory, but to examine himself and his interlocutor.

Some scholars want us to believe that Socrates' identification of doing good deeds with well-being was due to his failure to observe the ambiguity in the Greek phrase *eu prattein* which meant both doing something well and 'doing well'. But the identification was an integral

part of his total philosophy. Rather than thinking Socrates confused by the Greek idiom, it would be truer to say that the double-meaning in the Greek expression testifies to the moral insight of the people that gave that expression its double meaning.

For Socrates the first duty of a human being is the tendance of that most precious aspect of our personality which is called the soul — not, as Plato's language at times might suggest, in view of the immortality of the soul, but because our true character and our whole value consist simply in that: to betray that ideal is to commit spiritual suicide.

To understand Socrates' moral philosophy properly we have to view it in the light of his own life, for his philosophy and his life are truly inseparable. Socrates was a paragon of moral choice: his whole life was a deliberate moral choice. To exercise moral choice is to acknowledge that moral principles and values constitute the humanity and the worth of a human being. The essence of moral choice is the election by a human being of her/his essential worth in opposition to the false values that stem from a narrow outlook or an illusion. That is why Socrates believed that wrongdoing is nothing but ignorance. Thus those fools who let themselves be wronged rather than wrong another are wiser and more fortunate than the clever ones who value in the first place material gain or glory or power. If we find this hard to understand or believe, so much the worse for us: it only shows how far our nature (our human nature no less than our environmental nature) has been corrupted by the pernicious influences of bad ideologies and bad practices.

II

The *Gorgias* is one of my favourites among Plato's dialogues. Every re-reading gives me undiminished enjoyment and spiritual elevation. Yet I have little to say about it, because here, where moral principles and moral values are the subject-matter, there is not much to read between the lines or behind the words. The message is as clear as a child's "I love you, Mom".

The *Gorgias* is perhaps the longest of Plato's Dialogues apart from the *Republic* and the *Laws*. It consists mainly of three self-contained dialogues, through which however runs a common undercurrent of thought. The ostensible subject of discussion is the art of rhetoric. But Plato does not keep us long waiting before making it clear that he intends to show the difference between rhetoric and dialectic (in the sense of candid give and take in conversation, aiming at understanding, not victory in debate). At 448d Socrates remarks that Polus has

obviously been practising rhetoric rather than dialectic, *dêlos gar moi Pôlos kai ex hôn eirêken hoti tèn kaloumenên rhêtorikên mallon memeletêken ê dialegesthai*. Rhetoric, we are to find out, aims at persuasion for good or for ill, whereas the aim of dialectic is to examine oneself and one's interlocutor and in the end turns out to have one prime concern: to find out what life is best for a human being. So here in the *Gorgias* the discussion of the nature of rhetoric leads by stages, through the successive conversations with Gorgias, with Polus, and with Callicles, to an examination of moral principles which boils down to this very question, what life is best for human beings?

In his argument with Polus, Socrates affirms simply, prophetically, that righteousness is beauty and wholesomeness of soul. All the 'argumentation' is nothing but an artistic means of setting these notions – goodness, beauty of soul, health of soul – in a conceptual, ideal, configuration.

In his conversation with Callicles, Socrates affirms that he and Callicles are lovers of two very different beloveds. This is a true representation of the case. Socrates cannot prove that Callicles's love is false; he has to show that it is inferior.

Callicles rests his case on the distinction between convention and nature. But it is on this very distinction that we can defend the superiority of the 'foolish' morality of the idealist; for if human beings are human by virtue of their ideas – which is Socrates' basic principle – then life governed by a specific convention is the proper life for a human being. To live according to nature (not in communion and in harmony with nature *à la* Thoreau, but in subjection to nature *à la* Hobbes) is to live on a sub-human level.

Socrates forces Callicles to refine, by stages, his own notion of the superior person, till the superiority is seen to reside in nothing but intelligence.

Callicles cannot consistently distinguish good from pleasant (495a) because he does not have a criterion for the good other than pleasure; even if we decide to choose to have only refined pleasures we would lack a criterion for distinguishing the refined from the unrefined, and would thus need to have a standard other than pleasure for this.

III

Polus asks incredulously, Don't tyrants and orators have great power in the state?, and Socrates answers, Not if having power is something good, *ouk, ei to dunasthai ge legeis agathon ti einai tôi dunamenôi*

(466b). In a single seminal phrase we have the kernel of Socrates' moral philosophy. Power without intelligence is no good. And if to will (want) anything is to aim at what is good, then willing as distinct from being blindly swayed by opinion (belief), is inseparable from true understanding, and Socrates' tenet that no one does evil willingly is seen to be not a paradox but an axiom. To do evil willingly becomes a contradiction in terms when to act willingly means to act intelligently and to act intelligently means to aim at the good. The good, again, is nothing but the wholesomeness of intelligence. Once we digest the thought in the single Stephanus page 466, we realize that all the learned controversy about this dictum of Socrates was sheer fumbling in the dark.

When Socrates insists that tyrants and orators do what they think best but not what they will, Polus fails to understand that Socrates is establishing a meaningful distinction, and exclaims, What you are saying is preposterous and monstrous. Our learned scholars are in exactly the same position as Polus when they fail to see that Socrates' 'paradoxes' are fully coherent in the light of his conception of the one and only final and unconditioned good for a human being, the health of the soul.

Polus having admitted in argument that to do what one pleases is neither to have great power nor to do what one wills (468e), yet goes on to ask incredulously whether Socrates would not choose to do whatever he pleases. He is not arguing but debating. Neither he nor Socrates is demonstrating a thesis. Each of them is advocating an attitude, vindicating a choice he has made.

Socrates states his position quite simply: it is the greatest of evils to do wrong (469b). From this follows necessarily that to suffer wrong is a lesser evil than doing wrong (469c). These are simple corollaries of the belief that the greatest good is the wholesomeness of the soul. To do wrong is to injure one's soul; there can be no greater evil. This is the kernel of Socrates' and Plato's moral philosophy. It is the same in the *Crito*, in the *Phaedo*, in the *Laws*. It is the creed that led Plato to see in Socrates the best and wisest and most righteous of persons; the creed that Plato held to throughout his life and upheld in all his works.

The challenge that Polus poses to Socrates in 470c-d is the same as that posed by Adeimantus and Glaucon, though in a different spirit, at the beginning of Book II of the *Republic*. No wonder, for however much Plato may have developed and added to the philosophy he received from Socrates, where moral philosophy was concerned, Plato remained thoroughly Socratic from first to last.

Polus asks Socrates whether he thinks Archelaus of Macedonia or the Great King (of Persia) happy or wretched, and Socrates answers that he cannot say since he doesn't know how he stands with regard to education and righteousness, *ou gar oida paideias hopôs echei kai dikaiousunês* (470e). Polus is incredulous: Do you find the whole of happiness in these? Yes, a decent and good man or woman is happy, an unrighteous and evil one is wretched, *ton men gar kalon kai agathon andra kai gunaika eudaimona einai phêmi, ton de adikon kai ponêron athlion* (470e). — How anyone can speak of Socrates' moral philosophy as paradoxical is something I cannot comprehend. In these few words the rationality and coherence of Socrates' moral philosophy is simply transparent.

At 474c Socrates asks Polus, Which is uglier, to do wrong or to suffer wrong? Polus agrees that to do wrong is uglier. Socrates goes on, Then it is worse? Polus: Not in the least. — Commentators often say that Socrates in his arguments exploits the double meanings of such words as *aischron*, *kalon*, *eu prattein*. As I see it, Socrates does not eristically exploit these double meanings, but brings out the true moral insight that originally wedded the double meanings in these terms. Sometimes Plato does not find it necessary to make the process explicit. But in the present passage we see that Polus rejects the identification of *aischron* and *kakon* and Socrates has to show that the identification is justified, that he is not sophistically making use of a linguistic ambiguity but is disclosing a true insight embedded in the linguistic amalgam. I maintain that that is so regardless of what we may think of the argument advanced here (474d-475e). To my mind the argument here, like all argument in philosophy, proves nothing. Its value lies in revealing to the interlocutor, to us, that our common judgements about right and wrong, good and bad, are full of confusion and obscurity — that is the true function and value of the Socratic elenchus.

The concluding speech of Socrates addressed to Polus (480e-481b) is clearly meant to be paradoxical and not to be taken seriously. It is flatly contradicted by Socrates' solemn declaration in the *Crito* that it is never right to repay evil with evil. Hamilton's footnote to this passage in his translation of the *Gorgias* (Penguin, 1960) is perfectly just.

IV

Callicles's protest, perhaps immediately triggered by this last paradoxical speech but essentially addressed to Socrates' basic position,

is highly perceptive. If what Socrates has been saying is taken seriously, then normal human behaviour must be turned upside down, for we are doing the exact opposite of what, according to Socrates, we ought to do (481b-c). But then, that is just what Socrates has been calling for.

Socrates assures Callicles that he will always be bound by what philosophy (reason) dictates, even if everyone else contradicted him (482a-c). This is the same sentiment, here given playful expression, that Socrates solemnly affirms in the *Crito*, *hōs egō ou nun prōton alla kai aei toiousot hoios tōn emōn mēdeni allōi peithesthai ē tōi logōi hos an moi logizomenōi beltistos phainētai*, "For I am and always have been one of those natures who must be guided by reason, whatever the reason may be which upon reflection appears to me to be the best" (46b4-6, tr. Jowett).

The attack by Callicles in 482c-e, though violent and abusive, is in the main appropriate, perceptive, and to the point — from his standpoint. It is true that Polus's admission that to wrong another is base proved his downfall in the debate. Yet Socrates was not exploiting a hypocritical concession, but bringing to light an ideal he genuinely espoused. Again, Callicles objects, "The fact is, Socrates, that under pretence of pursuing the truth you are passing off upon your audience a low, popular notion of what is fine" (482e, tr. W. Hamilton). No one can prove that moral goodness is better than moral evil: Satan is within his rights in choosing to reign in hell rather than serve in heaven — though that fable is actually unrealistic in that, had Satan truly experienced serving in a spiritual heaven, he would not have exchanged that for anything. Once again, Callicles affirms that the notion advanced by Socrates is based on convention and not on nature, *ha phusei men ouk estin kala, nomōi de*. True; for moral values, in their distinctively human form, are cultural creations. This does not contradict the fact that they have roots in nature, as evidenced by the fact that cooperation, sympathy, fair-mindedness and other such traits are to be found among other animals as well.

I will not stop long by Callicles's presentation of his philosophy. It is all too familiar among us. If in private life most individuals follow it in the main but temper it with some consideration for higher ideals, in the international arena it practically reigns supreme. Give an exposition of the views of Machiavelli or Hobbes and you will be seen as offering platitudes. Try to give an exposition of the views of Tolstoy or Gandhi and people will receive that with the same polite complaisance and amusement that are proper for a nice fairy tale.

Plato makes Callicles devote the second part of his powerful initial diatribe to an attack on philosophy as a lifelong occupation (484c-486d). This is paralleled by the similar criticism of philosophy mouthed by Adeimantus in *Republic* 487b-d. In both cases Plato is concerned to correct the popular conception of philosophy as something alien to practical life. For both Socrates and Plato the philosophical life, which is one with the life of virtue, is the only life proper to human beings. The *Phaedo*, properly understood, is essentially an apology for the philosophical life, and all the works of Plato without exception are meant to serve that ideal.

At 488b-d Socrates defines with perfect clarity and precision what is at issue in his confrontation with Callicles. What meaning should we attach to the term 'better'? Callicles has clearly identified 'better' with more 'powerful'. What should we mean by this latter term? In the examples Callicles has adduced from the political sphere, power is nothing but brute force. In the sphere of civil and personal dealings, equally with Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, Callicles has to concede that this is unacceptable. In what follows, Socrates' intention is to show that only intelligence and moral excellence can give us a coherent conception of power consistent with our conception of ourselves as intelligent beings.

The instances Socrates at first introduces (490b-e) of the doctor having more food, the weaver having a greater coat, the farmer using more seed on his land simply serve to show that the idea advocated by Callicles is so far hazy and wanting in precision. Socrates then introduces the all-important idea of governing oneself as essential to virtue. As Spinoza would maintain, to be governed by one's desires and passions is not power or freedom but, on the contrary, impotence and servitude. Action, will, intelligence, are, for Socrates as for Spinoza, inseparable. But this is an ideal that Callicles rejects in principle. Hence, from this point onwards there can be no argument (argument can only proceed on some common ground, common assumptions), but only a debate between two opposed ideals of life. Socrates resorts to allegories and similes which fail to impress Callicles, and even those among us who are basically Socratic and Platonic are likely to find Callicles justified in this. It is only when Socrates moves on to raise the question whether all pleasures are good or not and whether we are to identify pleasure and happiness simply and absolutely (494e-495b) that we find ourselves once again in touch with seminal ideas.

Hamilton in a footnote to 496e (Penguin, p.99) alludes to the further discussion of the co-existence of pleasure and pain in the *Philebus*, then adds, "The argument of the *Gorgias*, which treats all pleasures as

'mixed', is clearly unsatisfactory." But no argument can ever be satisfactory once and for all time. Here Socrates argues against Callicles's unqualified identification of pleasure with good, and arguing on premises for which he obtained Callicles's explicit agreement. This is the only proper use of argument, to bring to light the implications of a given position, not to prove or disprove anything for good. Socrates cannot by any argument make Callicles agree that to suffer injustice is better than to commit injustice, but he can make him see that his unqualified identification of pleasure and good is formally shaky, so that finally at 499b he is driven to abandon his simplistic identification of pleasure and good, admitting that there are good pleasures and bad. But if pleasures can be adjudged good or bad, we must have a standard of good distinct from pleasure. This formal conclusion can be established by logical argument. But what that standard is, is a question that cannot be settled demonstratively. A young Plato or Antisthenes or Aristippus or Aeschines could be led by Socratic discourse to discover it within himself. But a hardened Thrasymachus or Callicles could not be convinced of his error as he could easily have been convinced that one side of a triangle could not be equal in length to the other two sides together or as the boy in the *Meno* could be convinced that doubling the side of a square does not give us the required doubled area.

At 507b-c Plato abandons any pretence of argument or proof and simply portrays his ideal of the good person who is one with the happy person, and in what follows he is simply sermonizing, not arguing.

The Socratic credo, the much maligned 'paradox', that no one does evil willingly, knowingly, follows simply as a corollary from the view that to do wrong is to harm one's soul. This view itself is what I call a creative idea, a prophetic proclamation; it creates, brings into being in the strictest sense, the soul that finds its own well-being in doing good. To one who has been endowed with such a soul, one who has known in oneself such a soul, the whole of Socrates' moral philosophy is axiomatic. To one who has not such a soul, any pure morality is strictly nonsensical.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE SOCRATIC ELENCHUS

Introduction

IN A GROUP OF EARLY DIALOGUES, possibly the earliest that Plato wrote, we find a uniform pattern. In a casual conversation mention is made of a particular virtue. Socrates shows himself desirous of understanding what we mean when we speak of that virtue. What is the specific character that we find in all instances (I find no merit in the now current 'instantiations') of that particular virtue. That is what Aristotle had in mind when he said that Socrates sought definitions, but, I think, to say that is to force Socrates into Aristotle's own shoes, and does not help us understand the true significance of the Socratic elenchus. The investigation then proceeds. The interlocutor offers an answer. Socrates wants a clearer understanding. But the further we go, the deeper we probe, the more perplexed we are: all the virtues seem to be running into each other, and while we find our quest constantly pointing to knowledge, when we ask, What knowledge?, we again find ourselves at a loss. The investigation reaches no agreed conclusion but ends in perplexity, *aporia*. It is odd that while all scholars know fully well that the elenctic dialogues uniformly end in *aporia*, yet they persist in asserting that the end of those dialogues was to reach definitions. I believe that the seemingly fruitless examination and the concluding *aporia* are the whole end and purpose of the elenctic dialogue.

Hugh Trdennick, in his Introduction to *The Last Days of Socrates* (Penguin Books, 1954), in describing Socrates' method says, "As soon as a term like Courage cropped up in the course of a conversation, he began by asking what it meant; and then, when the attempted answers proved to be unsatisfactory, proceeded to adduce various instances of courage, and show that, though different in detail, they have some common characteristic by which they are all recognizable as what they are; and this, expressed in words, is the definition" (p.10). I think this is

to read the dialogues with Aristotelean eyes and, in effect, to stand Socrates' method on its head. When Socrates asks what we mean by 'courage', he does so on the ground that in using such a general term we are employing a general idea, a form, which applies to all instances of courage. But that form is always elusive. Whenever we seek to reach it, it escapes us. The instances adduced by Socrates (or, rather, by his interlocutors) are examined not with a view to revealing the common characteristic, but to show that our verbal formulations, however much we refine them, fail to be true in every case. The formulations and the instances offered do not end in a satisfactory definition but in the acknowledgment that we could not (and never can) reach a definition: all our attempts end in *aporia*, in the confession of ignorance, which is the end (in all senses of the word) of the elenchus.

To my mind the widely-held view, originated by Aristotle, of the elenctic dialogues as seeking definitions, is misleading and gravely damaging. The elenchus may start with a 'What is so-and-so?' question (I purposely refrain from putting '*F*' in place of 'so-and-so', because the now universally adopted '*F*' comes with a whole retinue of presuppositions and associations which I reject.), but it never arrives at a definition. The 'failure' is not due to an incapacity that may be remedied. The ostensible failure is the end and purpose of the whole process. The *aporia* is the outward expression of the principle of philosophical ignorance, the realization that nothing extraneous to the mind can give us insight into the things that constitute our reality and worth as human beings. For that insight we have to look within, to see those realities in their own light, and to acknowledge that the sum of wisdom is, as Socrates puts it in the *Phaedo*, that it is by beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful. That was the lesson that Plato imbibed in ten years of association with Socrates and that he wanted to put through. The lesson could not be conveyed in any articulate formula or any set teaching. Plato tells us that plainly time and again. And even when the insight developed and fructified, Plato sought no more than to lead his readers to find that insight within their own minds. I believe that we can see all of Plato's works as working to that end and, thus seen, we find that all that Plato wrote makes good sense.

All of Socrates' discourses are carried out in performance of his mission, and his mission is that which he plainly sets out before his judges at his trial. Whatever we may think of the *Apology* as a veridical record of the trial proceedings, there can be no doubt that Socrates' account there of what he saw as his life-mission is what we should accept as true if we are to make sense of the whole of Plato's work.

At *Apology* 23a-b Socrates says that in declaring that no one was wiser than Socrates, the god was in effect saying, "Human wisdom is worth little or rather nothing. ... He among you, o humans, is wisest who, like Socrates, knows that in truth he is of no worth in respect of wisdom." Every student of philosophy has read this, repeated it, quoted it, time and again. But we make a serious mistake when we pass it by as simply an expression of humility. It is much more than that. It points to the principle of ignorance which is the basis both of Socrates' renunciation of the search for physical causes, of which he tells us in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo*, and of Plato's relegation of all objective knowledge to an inferior position in the 'divided line' in the *Republic*. Only the understanding of the ideas that constitute the ideal universe in which humans have their being as humans is proper to human beings and gives worth to human beings.

Immediately after the words quoted above, Socrates declares it his mission to go about, freeing all persons of the false conceit of knowledge (23b). For only when we realize that all of our vaunted knowledge is mere tinsel and look within ourselves can we attain our proper excellence as human beings.

Socrates asserts in the strongest terms that the one thing a human of any worth should take into consideration in doing anything is whether s/he is acting rightly or wrongly (in moral terms), *poteron dikaia ê adika prattei* (28b). He regards it as his mission to live philosophically, examining himself and others (28e). For it is the gravest and most blameworthy ignorance to think that one knows what one doesn't know (29b).

Socrates solemnly declares to his judges that if they were to offer to release him on condition that he should stop philosophizing, his answer would be:

Men of Athens, I thank you and am grateful to you, but will obey God rather than you, and as long as I breathe and am able, I will not cease from philosophizing and admonishing you and urging every one of you I ever happen to meet, saying as I am used to saying, 'O worthy man, ... are you not ashamed of exerting yourself to obtain as much as possible of money and reputation and honour, while you neither care for nor give thought to wisdom and truth and how to become as excellent as possible in your soul?' And if any of you contest this and say that he does care, I do not straightaway let him go, but question him and examine him and test him, and if he appears to me not to possess virtue yet says he does, I reprove him for caring least about what is of most worth, and caring most about the least

worthy of things. I do this with whomever I chance upon, young or old, citizen or foreigner ... This is what God has set me to do, and I believe that no greater good has befallen you in the city than this service of mine in obedience to God. I have no business other than going around, exhorting you, both young and old, to care for neither body nor material goods before, or so much as, caring for being as excellent as possible in the soul. (29d-30a.)

Once again at 31b we find him saying that, in pursuing his mission, he neglected his own affairs, busying himself instead with approaching each one individually, like a father or elder brother, exhorting him to attend to virtue.

When the judges have voted to condemn Socrates and are to consider what penalty to impose, again we find Socrates re-affirming his position. He has not spent his life, like others, seeking private gain or public service, but has devoted himself to seeking to do the greatest service to each one individually by persuading him not to concern himself with any of his affairs before concerning himself with being himself as good and as wise as possible, nor to care for the affairs of the state before caring for the goodness of the state (36c).

And then we have the sum of Socrates' credo condensed in a few words: the best life for a human being is to discourse daily of virtue, for the unexamined life is no life for a human being (38a).

As we find Socrates repeatedly saying in the dialogues, in entering into dialogue with an interlocutor, his purpose is not primarily to examine any object or idea or statement, but to examine his own and the interlocutor's soul. The purpose of the elenchus is not to reach any conclusion – which, as Plato was to show in his mature works, can never be anything but at best provisional and only partially true – but to turn the mind's eye within where alone all reality is.

If, believing Plato's account in the *Apology* to be substantially truthful, we hold that Socrates meant what he said, then we can see that, for Socrates, the elenchus was simply the practical pursuit of his life-mission. In the early dialogues Plato succeeds not only in giving us a living picture of Socrates practising it, but also in revealing the philosophy behind it. On this understanding, I will in what follows comment on the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Euthyphro*, *Meno* (part), *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*. Book One of the *Republic* would be very much in place here, but as I deal with it in Chapter Seven, "The Argument of the *Republic*", I have not found it necessary to take it up in the present essay.

The group of dialogues I will consider in this essay are all masterly literary pieces, each in the form of a novella, rich in description, character portrayal, and lively conversation. This should tell us that it was not the aim of Plato in these dialogues to convey any fixed doctrine, but to make the reader live the experience of being present at a Socratic discourse, the end of which was never to teach anything, but to stir, perplex, and move interlocutor and audience to probe their own minds. Socrates' firm convictions and fundamental principles were not conveyed in fixed statements or conclusions, but were revealed as insights that the interlocutor and audience, ideally, were led to in the process of self-examination. For, as Socrates affirmed, *ho anexetastos bios ou biôtos anthrôpoi*, since, without self-examination, a person cannot realize the proper excellence of a human being.

LACHES

The *Laches* is a model elenctic dialogue. The argument, when we eventually get to it, is straightforward, unencumbered by digressions or ingression into more complex or more sophisticated considerations. The dramatic setting is elaborate and the characterization of the interlocutors convincing. Of the two principal interlocutors, Laches was a famous general under whom Socrates had fought at the unhappy battle of Delium; Nicias, another famous general, was well-acquainted with the philosophical discourses of Socrates. Of the two senior gentlemen who initiate the discussion, Lysimachus had been a lifelong friend of Socrates' father. So the atmosphere of the conversation is friendly and deferential, which helps keep the argument to the point, though this still leaves room for Socrates' incisive yet suave irony and for some neighbourly bickering between the two generals. (The dialogue as a whole, however, in my opinion, shows the marks of a youthful work, before Plato fully mastered his tools. The speeches in the first part are unduly prolix and there is no 'action' – contrast the lively *Charmides* – and at many points Plato's eagerness to 'document' the life and ways of Socrates is somewhat obtrusive.)

Lysimachus and Melesias have each a son. The boys have apparently completed their standard schooling and the fathers are eager to let their sons have the best possible further education. They have just attended a demonstration by Stesilaus who professes to teach the technique of fighting in full armour. The fathers have invited the two generals to attend the demonstration with them to help them decide whether to let their sons take that course. Unfortunately Nicias and

Laches differ, the one thinking it would be a good thing, the other strongly disagreeing.

Lysimachus therefore asks Socrates to cast the deciding vote. Now Socrates introduces a familiar line of argument of his. The opinion of an expert outweighs the opinions of any number of non-experts. The decision should be based on knowledge, not on a majority vote (184d-185a). But with what knowledge are we concerned here? Socrates takes the discussion to the area of his lifelong and overriding concern. The final aim of the education or training we seek for our children is or should be the good of their souls (185b-e). Now if we have the ability to impart goodness (*aretê*, virtue, excellence) to a soul, then we presumably should know what goodness is (190b). Laches has no hesitation in saying that we do know. Socrates suggests that to inquire into what goodness as a whole is would not be easy. Let us instead inquire into a part of goodness; that would be easier. What part shall we choose? In the context of our present discussion, courage (*andreia*, manliness, pluck) seems to be most relevant. So what is courage? (190c-e.)

Laches who, unlike Nicias, is innocent of philosophy, sees no difficulty there: anyone who remains at his post in the face of the enemy and does not run away is courageous (190e). Socrates easily shows Laches that his idea of courage is too restricted. He gives Laches a sample of a satisfactory 'definition': if we were asked, what is common to all acts and processes described as quick?, we might say it is the quality of doing much in a little time (191a-192b).

In the elenctic dialogues, when Socrates asks his interlocutor what he means by this or that word, the interlocutor commonly lists a number of instances or gives a circumstantial description of a particular instance. The notion of a general concept, for which we are indebted in the first place to Socrates, is new and has to be clarified. So when Plato makes Socrates give an example of a proper definition, as here or at *Meno* 74b-76d, the purpose is not, in my opinion, to set a paradigm to be followed in the inquiry, but simply to direct the interlocutor's attention away from particular instances and accidental accretions to the essential character we are seeking to understand.

Laches now says that if we want a general characterization applicable to all instances of courage, then it seems to be a kind of firmness of the soul, *karteria tês psuchês*, (192b-c). But not all persistence is courage. Courage we regard as a fine thing. Persistence accompanied by good sense (*meta phronêseôs*) is fine. But persistence divorced of good sense is harmful; it is not fine. Courage being fine, such persistence would not be courage. So you would say that wise

(*phronimos*) persistence is courage. Let us see, wise in what way? We find many instances of sensible persistence which we would not regard as courage. So the qualification 'sensible' or 'wise' does not hold without exception; we even find instances of 'foolish' persistence that are more likely to be regarded as courage (192c-193d).

Let us ourselves at any rate, says Socrates, show persistence in our quest for courage. But Laches admits he is not equal to the task. Socrates calls on Nicias to come to the rescue. Plato now manages a dramatical sleight-of-hand: instead of making Socrates argue to the familiar position that goodness is inseparable of wisdom, he makes Nicias remind Socrates of this tenet of his. I have often, says Nicias, heard you say that each of us is good where he is wise and bad where he is ignorant. So if a courageous person is good, he must be wise, and courage would be a sort of knowledge. But what sort of knowledge? Nicias offers the view – which we are to assume he had heard Socrates advancing – that it is the knowledge of what should properly inspire fear and what should properly inspire confidence (194d-195a). Now this is a view Socrates arrives at in the *Protagoras* (a probably much later dialogue) and leaves unquestioned, because there the intention is simply to arrive at the idea of the inseparability of virtue and intelligence. Here the intention is to show that this wisdom (I intentionally vary my terms, as Plato himself does, and for the same reason) cannot be characterized by or attached to anything extraneous.

Laches finds this an odd view; like 'Protagoras', he thinks wisdom one thing and courage quite a different thing. Laches argues: in matters of disease, the doctors know what is to be feared, not the courageous, and we do not call the doctors courageous. And the same goes in other areas of expertise (195a-c). Nicias explains: the doctors' knowledge does not extend beyond physical health and disease; they do not know if it is really better for a particular patient to live or die. Only those who know what is truly to be feared are courageous. Laches thinks Nicias is referring to soothsayers, and rhetorically accosts Nicias: Do you consider yourself a soothsayer or are you not courageous? Nicias again explains: soothsayers only read the signs of coming events, but whether the predicted death or recovery, victory or defeat, will prove truly beneficial or harmful, that the soothsayers cannot tell (195c-196a).

Laches thinks Nicias is talking nonsense; Socrates offers to find out what Nicias truly means. So we say that courage is the knowledge of what is to be feared and what not, and this knowledge is not possessed by either doctor or soothsayer, and these are not courageous unless in addition to their expert knowledge they happen to have this other knowledge. Neither can any ferocious beast be credited with courage.

Laches thinks this the height of unreason, but Nicias distinguishes between foolhardy daring or thoughtless fearlessness on the one hand and thoughtful courage on the other hand. Laches has no stomach for such refined distinctions which flout common usage (196c-197c). It is one of the main functions of Socratic discourse to bring out into the light assumptions and associations that lie hidden in our common speech and common beliefs.

Socrates says that Nicias deserves that we give due consideration to what he means. From the point where Nicias 'reminded' Socrates of his view about the inseparability of goodness and wisdom, Nicias has been presenting familiar Socratic positions. Now Socrates has to show that those views, however pregnant with meaning, when examined more closely, are seen to be insufficient and to point to something beyond.

We started by taking courage as a part of virtue. We say there are other virtues or parts of virtue, such as temperance and justice. Now about the fearful and the hopeful: fear and hope do not relate to past or present but to the future; we take it that the fearful is expectation of evil and the hopeful is expectation of good. The knowledge of such is what we call courage. Now knowledge is unbound by the divisions of past, present, and future. The same field of knowledge covers past, present, and future instances. But courage we said is knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, that is, of future evil and future good. But as knowledge it must be knowledge of past, present, and future; it cannot then be knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, but of good and evil without restriction. But that would be the whole of virtue. We have not then found what we set out to find, the nature of courage (198a-199e).

To see this as a negative conclusion would be superficial. The positive dimension of the negative result is that we get nowhere if we start from virtues as separate parts or if we take virtue or any one virtue separately from knowledge. This is only one aspect of the Socratic principle of ignorance.

CHARMIDES

Note: The discussion in the Charmides turns around the word sôphrosunê, which it is not easy to render in English. It is not possible to translate the word in all contexts by the same English word. However, for the present, I have decided to stick to the somewhat archaic temperance. Why is this beautiful word obsolescent if not already completely obsolete in current English? Is the sad reason that the quality itself has disappeared from modern society?

The playfully erotic overture of the *Charmides* does not keep us waiting long before it reveals the true goal of this and every other dialogue of Plato. Chaerephon says: Doesn't the lad have a beautiful face? But if you were to see his naked form, you would think nothing of his face. Socrates says: He would indeed be beyond compare if he had one more thing — a fine soul. Why not let him strip and show us his soul? (154d-e.) That is the purpose, the goal, the mission to which Socrates devoted the whole of his life: to strip off the soul all foreign accoutrements and let her stand naked in her own view. All of the argument, the elenchus, the aporia, has only this prime purpose, to fulfil the injunction *gnôthi sauton*.

This is still further underlined by the fiction or rather allegory of the medicine and the charm that cannot cure the head before the soul is cured by means of fine words which instil temperance in the soul (155e-157c). Critias says that his nephew Charmides is preeminent in that virtue, namely, temperance, that the charm is to instil in the soul. And so we have the formal theme of the dialogue and the elenctic process is started.

After the playful preliminaries, Socrates begins the examination of Charmides by saying, "I think it would be best to examine the question in this way. Clearly, if temperance is present in you, you will have some notion of it. For necessarily, being in you – if it is in you – it must give some perception, from which you will have some opinion about what it is and what kind of thing temperance is" (158e-159a). Thus at the very outset Socrates spells out the assumption which lurks behind all the elenctic discourses, and which those discourses invariably shatter. Temperance is assumed to be something which the individual has and about which that individual has a notion. The elenchus, in all of the elenctic discourses, reveals that the virtue cannot be separated from the person, nor can the idea of the virtue be separated from the virtue. The form has its reality in the soul and the soul is the final reality. All separation, all fragmentation, all objectification, all extrapolation, all particularization – all of which are of the very essence of thought – are revealed to have contradictoriness in-built in their very being. This is the core of Socratic thought and the foundation of dialectic.

All of the arguments of the elenctic discourses have the same basic structure. Any definition that reduces or constricts a form to certain objective characteristics or conditions is easily shown to be inadequate. Not only do the early dialogues provide plentiful examples, but all contemporary philosophical controversies can be shown to exemplify the same principle. The more sophisticated, the more intricate, a

definition, an argument, a theory, is, the more festering is its contradictoriness. Show me one, however authoritative its author, that has not been refuted by one of equal authority. Has not the proud *Cogito, ergo sum* been taken to pieces?

Well, says Socrates to Charmides, if you already have the virtue of temperance, as Critias affirms, then you have no need for the charm and I can give you the medicine straightaway: tell me, do you actually partake of temperance? (158b-c). Here Socrates employs the phrase *sôphrosunês metechlein*. Here it is clearly not possible to take the phrase in the sense it was to assume in the middle dialogues when Plato was seeking a satisfactory formula for relating the forms to the actual instances. The phrase here is clearly part of the common Hellenic tongue.

Charmides, as a well-bred boy, will neither brag of being temperate, nor deny it, which would, beside giving the lie to his uncle, sound insolent (158c-d). Socrates suggests that they examine together whether the boy is in possession of the virtue or not (158d-e). Here Socrates uses *kektêsai*, and just a few lines below we have *parestin* and again *enestin*, all as equivalent to *metechlein*, which shows that these phrases are being used freely, without any technical sense attached. (And in the *Phaedo* Plato clearly indicates that it makes no difference which of these metaphors we chose to adopt.)

Asked what temperance is in his opinion, Charmides at first says that temperance seems to be to do everything decently and quietly, in walking on the way and in talking, and in all such things; on the whole it seems to be a sort of quietness (159b). This of course is the kind of answer one would expect from such a lad as Charmides was: it is what he would gather from the injunctions of his mother and his elders. But in all of the early dialogues, even when the interlocutor is a well-educated grown-up man, to the question, what is this or that quality?, the answer given is never much better than this: the interlocutor usually mentions an instance or lists a number of instances. It is important to note this because I believe that we are indebted for the ideas of concept and of essence to Socrates. (This is what Aristotle intimates when he says Socrates was the first to seek definitions.) At any rate, Charmides has ended his initial answer by settling on one quality which he gives as what he understands by temperance. He saves Socrates the need to explain, as he does with the others, the difference between giving an inventory of instances and giving the meaning, the essential characterization, of an abstract term. Now the elenchus can proceed.

So it is said that the quiet are temperate. Now, is not temperance a fine thing? Indeed. But we can find many acts and practices where

quickness and energy and sharpness, not quietness and slowness, are good. So temperance is not quietness, if temperance is good (159b-160b). Here we have to note two points. First, Socrates alternates between quietness and slowness on one side, and quickness, energy, sharpness, and strength, on the other side, with a carefree nonchalance that is anathema to our academic philosophers. This should show them that Socrates is not concerned with argument or proof as they understand argument and proof. Socrates proceeds leisurely, leading the boy to reflect on one ideal configuration after the other, for that is the main purpose and goal of the elenchus, to let the interlocutor look within. The second point is that Socrates does not draw any positive conclusion. He simply observes that temperance is not quietness *tout simple*. He goes on: either quiet acts and practices are never or only seldom better than quick and energetic ones, or, if they are not less often good than the quick and energetic ones, even so temperance would no more be associated with quietness than with quickness and energy (160b-d). This open-endedness is characteristic of Socratic and Platonic thought.

So far we have only found out that quietness may sometimes be part of temperance, but this does not give us the understanding we want of the meaning of temperance.

Socrates proceeds: Once again, Charmides, applying your mind more attentively and looking within yourself, reflect and tell me what temperance appears to you to be (160d). Charmides upon reflection says temperance seems to give a person a sense of shame and modesty, and so temperance appears to be a sort of modesty, *aidôs* (160e). Charmides has not been affected by Socrates' rehearsal of good acts involving quickness and energy. The boy is truly drawing his answers from his own mind and experience — thinking for himself. When we come to the *Republic* we find Plato making that the be-all and end-all of education: leading people to think for themselves.

Once again Socrates proceeds to show that this is not a sufficient answer, much in the same way as before. We have agreed that temperance is fine, and the temperate are good people. That which makes people good must be good. Since temperance makes people good, it is not only fine but also good. Now Homer says that modesty is not good for a needy man, and Homer has a point there. If so, then modesty is both good and not good. But temperance we say is simply good, since it makes people good and not bad. Then temperance would not be modesty if temperance is good without qualification while modesty is good or bad according to circumstances (160e-161b). This is a sample of one arm of the standard strategy of the elenchus. Any fixed

idea, taken separately, is seen to be inadequate; set in different circumstances it differs in value. This insight comes to full flower in Plato's mature idea of dialectic, where no determinate formulation of thought can claim absolute truth or finality. (But Plato uses the term 'dialectic' in various other senses as we shall have occasion to see.) To preserve the integrity of our intelligence we have to realize that all of our ideal structures are myths, and if we are not to turn our insightful and truth-inspiring myths into dead and deadly dogmas and superstitions, we have constantly to demolish the grounds on which they were erected. In this digression I am going far beyond the scope of the present essay, but I think this is not inapt since I believe that the Socratic elenchus is the original seed of the mature Platonic dialectic, and, I will add, at the risk of sounding arrogant, of my conception of the nature of philosophical thinking. But before I end this digression I have to refer briefly to the other arm of the elenctic strategy. The elenchus invariably ends in aporia and cannot but end in aporia. That aporia is the philosophical ignorance – or, to borrow the title of a mystic work of the fourteenth century, the cloud of unknowing – through which we gain two vital insights: (1) No idea can be defined by any characters extraneous to it. An idea has its evidence in its own reality. That is the insight Socrates expresses in saying that it is by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. That is the insight that reductionists of every hue and colour are too clever to understand. (2) The same elenctic process, in searching for the knowledge that is one with virtue, leads to the insight that that knowledge is none other than that activity of searching itself, none other than the exercise of intelligence — the intelligence that is our reality and our whole worth.

Plato now decides to take the conversation to a more 'sophisticated' level, and makes the boy remember a saying he had heard – presumably from Critias – to the effect that temperance is attending to what is one's own (161b). Socrates says that it is not easy to understand this clever saying since it is a riddle. The words do not truly convey the meaning. Doesn't a teacher attend to what pertains to him in writing or reading? Yet he doesn't write or read only his name but also the names of the students and also of friends and enemies. Is he being a busybody and not temperate? Also a doctor, an architect, a weaver, all attend to things pertaining to others, and yet they are all temperate in doing so. Temperance then is not attending to what is one's own in this sense (161c-162b). Clearly such an 'argument' is not intended to prove or disprove anything. Its sole purpose is to draw attention to the ambiguity of the statement examined. How often do we accept without question statements that we vaguely feel we understand, which yet, if we look

into more closely, we find quite obscure. This happens in all areas and on all levels. You may be translating a familiar text, when you come upon a passage or a sentence that you always passed over as quite clear and simple, but now that you wish to clothe the meaning in new words, you discover that it is really puzzling, capable of multiple, possibly contradictory, interpretations. One of the main purposes of the elenchus is to induce in the interlocutor (now, the reader) this puzzlement. The exigences of life necessitate that we take much for granted. Descartes, sitting at dinner, would starve to death, if he subjected the situation to his systematic doubt. Santayana said we cannot survive without animal faith. Yet we have to be constantly alert to the truth that we are intellectually and spiritually dead to the extent of our unexamined beliefs. To remain alive we need constantly to be jolted into puzzlement and disbelief and wonder.

Now Critias takes over the role of interlocutor. Socrates resumes: specialists do work for others and are temperate. Does not that clash with saying that temperance is attending to what is one's own? But Critias draws a distinction between making and attending to (doing) things. When Socrates asks, are these not the same?, Critias is ready with a quotation from Hesiod. Work is no disgrace, says Hesiod. Could Hesiod say such a thing if he understood by work such sordid things as making shoes and selling dried fish? (162e-163c). Here is a lesson Plato never tired of underscoring. If you are ready to let a fixed text do your thinking for you, you will always be in the enviable position of being able to eat your cake and have it, since your text will obligingly yield whatever meaning you will.

Socrates tries to curb Critias's irrelevancies. I knew, he says, that you would call what is proper good and would call good works deeds, for I have heard Prodicus making his endless distinctions. Use whatever words you wish, provided only you make clear what the words refer to. Now state more clearly, do you say that the making or doing or what you will of good things is temperance? (163d-e.) We note of course that this is not the same statement we began with, but the shift was made by Critias in his interpretation of the words of Hesiod, and he readily agrees that this is what he means.

Socrates now introduces a subtle argument. The subtlety however is not in the argument as such, which, like every argument, can be shaken. The subtlety is there because Socrates is leading to one of his profound insights: no virtue and no goodness can be genuinely such if not united with intelligence. We miss the true meaning and the true value of the argument if we focus on the sufficiency or insufficiency of its logical form.

One who does what is bad, then, is not temperate, but only one who does good. But then an odd consequence follows: one may be acting temperately while being ignorant of the fact (163e-164c). A doctor may be doing his duty, and so acting temperately, in curing his patient, but he cannot know if his action will be good in a wider perspective. His patient may turn out to be a serial killer, or else he may be fated to undergo insufferable torment. Whenever we use the terms good or bad, if we are not dealing with pure ideas but referring to actualities, we must remember that these terms are relative and contingent. As Kant was to say, the only absolutely good thing is a good will, which Socrates had anticipated in holding that the only absolutely good thing is intellectual and moral integrity — these being one thing.

Critias now agrees that, if his earlier statements do lead to the conclusion pointed out by Socrates, he would give up those statements rather than concede that a person can be temperate and yet ignorant of his own temperance. Rather, it is a condition of being temperate that one should know oneself; he therefore equates the Delphic *gnôthi sauton* with the injunction 'be temperate' (164c-165b).

Socrates says: If temperance is a knowing, *gignôskein*, then *epistêmê tis an eiê kai tinos*, it would be a knowledge and a knowledge of something [pardon the pidgin English; I want to keep close to the original without having to say 'a science'] (165c). Here we come to what I referred to above as the second arm of the elenctic strategy. Socrates leads to the position that virtue or a particular virtue is knowledge, then asks, what knowledge or knowledge of what? And we always find that it cannot be any particular knowledge. It is just the activity of knowing, the exercise of intelligence, the life of the mind. So here too, Socrates at first proceeds on the usual lines: medicine produces health, architecture produces houses, so what does temperance give us? Critias protests: perhaps temperance is more akin to arithmetic and geometry. But these too have their subject-matter; so what is the subject-matter of the knowledge that is temperance? (165c-166b.)

Critias again protests: we are trying to find that in which temperance differs from other kinds of knowledge, but you, Socrates, want it to be similar to the others. All the others are knowledge of another; temperance alone is knowledge of itself. Critias thus shifts from saying that temperance is knowing oneself to saying that temperance alone of all types of knowledge is knowledge of itself and of other types of knowledge (166c-e).

Plato perhaps engineered this shift because he did not have in mind to examine the problem of self-knowledge or self-reference as it has

been posed in modern philosophy. Instead, he was interested in something more like what we now refer to as the problem of self-predication.

Well then, according to Critias's revised definition *sôphrosunê* is said to be *epistêmôn epistêmê* (166e). Socrates shows that the fine-sounding definition is really nonsensical. It is not only inadequate, as is the case with other proposed definitions examined in this and other dialogues, but it also does not yield any intelligible meaning. Why?, we may ask. Because in seeking a knowledge of knowledge we corrupt the nature of knowledge, which is an activity, by turning it into an object. Knowledge and the object of knowledge are essentially one whole, and though it is permissible and necessary to distinguish knowledge and the object of knowledge, yet this distinction already involves falsification; to treat the act of knowledge as an object, is, like eating of that Forbidden Tree, a necessary and glorious sin, but still a sin, a higher-order falsification if you will, that is highly pernicious if not committed in full consciousness of its sinfulness. There lies the error of our academics and scholars who labour to produce theories of knowledge and of truth that are meant to be not simply useful but absolutely invulnerable, incorruptible.

Similarly, the so-called problem of self-knowledge is a pseudo-problem we moderns have created for ourselves by our inveterate habit of dismembering and fragmenting everything. I will allow myself to give here in outline what I see as the crux of the problem of self-knowledge. In knowledge of the outer world we have the distinction between knower and object known, a useful conceptual distinction but no more than that. Self-knowledge – for which the word 'knowledge' is only to be used under reservation – is the realization of the reality of the self (mind) in the immediacy of self-awareness, the immediacy of understanding. To objectify the self (mind) is to falsify the self. This is the rock upon which all the attempts of neuroscientists and philosophers of mind to capture the mind come to grief. In my terminology, the self (mind) does not exist. But to equate 'does not exist' with 'has no reality' is the error which has vitiated all empirically-oriented philosophical trends. The self (mind) cannot be objectified, cannot exist, but transcends existence in a reality beyond all existent actuality, like the Form of the Good which is beyond existence and beyond determinate knowledge — not beyond understanding, because it is itself pure, active, creative intelligence.

To go back to the *Charmides*: Socrates has no difficulty in showing the incongruity of the notion of knowledge of knowledge, if knowledge is understood on the analogy of the particular kinds of knowledge for

which the word is commonly used (167c-168a). But supposing we overlook all the difficulties we have been considering and agree to say that this knowledge of knowledge is possible, how does it enable us to know what we know and what we don't? Being simply knowledge of knowledge it will not give us knowledge of health or disease, for that is the province of medicine, nor will it enable us to distinguish between a quack and a genuine physician. It will be a knowledge without any content whatever (169d-171c).

But further, even if we had a super-science that provided us with sure criteria for distinguishing true knowledge from imposture in all professions and trades, and if we were to have a state where unfailing experts were in charge of everything — would that assure us of well-being and happiness? (171d-173d.) Let us here translate the argument into our own times. More than half of humankind are living in misery and disease; let us forget about them — we don't need much urging to do that, do we? But the fortunate ones, those living in opulent societies, employing all the wizardry of modern science and digital technology — they are hardly blessed! What is it they lack? Socrates has the answer: the knowledge of good and evil. And when we ask: What is that knowledge? Where do we find it? The oracle has one answer: *gnôthi sauton*. But we are so clever that we find it difficult to believe that this is the true answer, the only answer.

LYSIS

Note. The Lysis is usually grouped with the Laches and Charmides. But while the Laches and Charmides are typical examples of the Socratic elenchus, the Lysis posits important logical problems and reverberates with strong metaphysical undertones. I would describe it as a Platonic exploratory venture into logical and metaphysical grounds. Here I will only deal with the elenctic dimension of the dialogue but will comment on its other aspects later on in connection with the Parmenides, with which I find it has more affinity than with the elenctic discourses.

The *Lysis*, a short dialogue in some 20 Stephanus pages (203-223), falls into two easily separable parts. The first half is a lively drama in which is embedded a piece of didactic conversation with Lysis (207-210) which, like the first sample conversation with Nicias in the *Euthydemus*, gives in a straightforward manner the moral lesson of the elenchus — knowledge is the basis of goodness and happiness and

freedom. The second part examines the idea of friendship and ends with the customary *aporia*. It shows the necessity of facing and combatting the inevitable ambiguities of language, of all articulations of thought. But it also invites us to probe deeper.

Hippothales asks Socrates to tell him by what manner of words or deeds he can win over his beloved. Socrates says that is not easy to say, but if Hippothales would draw the lad into conversation with Socrates, he could perhaps show him how to converse with the boy.

Lysis having joined the group of men, preceded by his friend Menexenus, Socrates draws the two boys into conversation. But Menexenus is soon called away and Socrates continues the dialogue with Lysis. The boy's parents love him well; they wish him to be as happy as can be. Can anyone be happy when one is restrained and cannot do whatever one wants? No. Yet the boy's parents do not allow the boy to do whatever he wants. They wouldn't let him mount one of his father's chariots in a race, although they let a hireling do that. They even put him in the charge of a slave who sees him to school, where again he is ruled by his teachers. At home his mother wouldn't let him tamper with her spinning and weaving; she even gives him a beating if he does.

Why do his parents stand so much in his way? Lysis thinks it is because he is still too young. Socrates lets him see that that cannot be the true explanation, since there are other areas where they gladly let him do as he pleases; he can read and write and play the lyre whenever and however he wants. Why? Because these things he knows how to do. That's it! Where we have knowledge, where we are seen to have understanding, not only father and mother, but neighbours and citizens and the whole world will entrust us with their possessions and all their affairs, because we would do them good. Then we are free; but where we have no understanding, no one will let us have our way. So, to be free and happy we must have understanding.

No doubt there were occasions when Socrates thought such admonition was all a certain young interlocutor was ripe for, or all a particular occasion permitted. And this would be the kind of conversation a Xenophon would remember and care to put on record. And of course it was all of a piece with Socrates' life-time mission. But Socrates also knew that the lesson would only strike root when the interlocutor was led to dive for it into the depths of his own mind. That was the function of the *elenchus* proper.

Towards the end of the conversation with Lysis, Socrates has used phrases like be friendly towards, befriend, love. Now Menexenus returns to join the group and Lysis asks Socrates to question

Menexenus as he has questioned him. Socrates chooses to take friendship as the subject for discussion, a subject he seemed already to be leading to in speaking with the boys before Menexenus was called away.

So the second part (212-223), which includes the properly elenctic element, deals with friendship; but it does not start, in the manner of the typical 'definition' dialogues with the question: What is friendship?, but with a more complex question: When one befriends another, which of the two is the friend of the other, the friendly of the befriended or the befriended of the friendly? (Excuse the clumsiness of expression; the original is really untranslatable and any attempt to put the question in better English must beg lots of questions.)

At this point we are tempted to suspect that the dialogue is wandering beyond habitual Socratic grounds, dealing not with moral questions, but delving into the intricate logical problem of relative terms. But it is not as simple as that: the logical problems are in the air and the metaphysical undertones I mentioned in my prefatory note are in the background, but the dialogue nevertheless goes on to examine the substantive problem of the nature of friendship.

Here, as in all of the dialogues, particularly the 'definition' dialogues, Socrates explores and bares the ambiguities and inadequacies of language. As these traits in any one language do not tally exactly with those characteristic of another language, it is this aspect of the Socratic elenchus that gives most trouble to translators. (This is my excuse for the clumsy wording above.) When we speak of friendship, are we speaking of a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity? Or are we speaking of a feeling on the part of one side of the relationship towards the other? In the latter case, do we mean to name the agent or the object of the unitary relation? It is because no language forged for the practical exigences of life can afford to take account of such nuances that there will always be ambiguities and inadequacies in expression. Hence we have always to examine and re-examine our notions and assumptions, constantly subjecting our thought to a Socratic elenchus.

So Socrates goes on uncovering the contradictions that inevitably follow when a term that serves its purpose in one context is expected to serve equally well in a different context. No language can ever have absolute validity and finality because our thought, once formulated, is by necessity always relevant to certain givennesses and so can never be absolute or definitive.

We cannot find a finally satisfactory definition to a term because to define is to limit, and to limit is to determine in terms extraneous to the

term defined. The connotation of the term (form) defined is thus of necessity always deficient and subject to contradiction.

The argument in 215 to the effect that the good, being sufficient for himself, will not love another, is not there to establish the specious conclusion drawn but to show the contradictoriness involved in taking our linguistic formulations uncritically. But if we are tempted to think the argument trite or patently implausible, then we should remind ourselves that no lesser a man than Spinoza affirmed the conclusion quite seriously.

In the end, all *philon* leads us up to *ekeino auto eis ho pasai hautai hai legomenai philia teleutôsin* (220b). All good leads us up to that one good, that knowledge, which however much we try we cannot specify, and that we can find nowhere but in our eager search for it.

EUTHYPHRO

Socrates goes to the Stoa of the Archon Basileus for the preliminary formalities in connection with the charges brought against him by Meletus. There he meets Euthyphro, a theologian and soothsayer, who has come to lodge charges against his own father for unlawfully causing the death of a hireling serving on the family farm. Euthyphro is motivated by religious considerations. He is not an ingrate or disloyal son and has no concern for the victim. But the causing of death without due process brings pollution upon the house of the perpetrator and has to be cleansed by bringing the responsible party to justice. So Euthyphro sees his proceeding as an act of piety, and this provides the theme of the dialogue.

Socrates puts his introductory question to Euthyphro with greater precision and comprehensiveness than usual in the other elenctic dialogues: "What kind of thing do you say the pious (*to eusebes*) is and the impious (*to asebes*) both as regards manslaughter and in other matters? Is not the pious (*to hosion*) in itself the same thing in all acts, and the impious (*to anosion*) opposed to the pious as a whole, in itself the same with itself, having one single character (*mian tina idean*) as impiety (*tên anosiotêta*) in whatever may be impious?" (5c-d.) Do we see Plato here beginning to introduce some precision and system into the more homely and informal manner of the earlier elenctic dialogues? I content myself with suggesting the question. As I have repeatedly said, I am neither qualified nor desirous to enter the arena of scholarly debate; and the answer to the question, whichever way it goes, does not affect the philosophy I derive from the dialogues. One more remark at

this point: throughout, Socrates uses *to eusebes* and *to hosion* indifferently, and it is safe to take the two terms as fully interchangeable.

In the *Euthyphro* Plato uses the terms *idea* (5d), *eidos* (6d), *ousia* (11a) for the single character or meaning we are seeking. Depending on where we place the *Euthyphro* chronologically within the works of Plato, this may be taken (if it is placed very early) as an indication that Socrates was in the habit of using these terms, or (if it is placed later) as an indication that the terms were due to Plato. But in either case I would stress two points: (1) the view that such concepts are what constitutes the spiritual realm in which a human being lives as a human being was the core of Socrates' philosophy, and the examination of those concepts was his lifelong work; (2) Plato to the end continued to use those terms indifferently, with his customary disregard for technicalities, without ever abandoning or altering the fundamental Socratic view.

I have to reiterate once more what I have often insisted upon, because it is vital for the understanding of Socrates' thought and for the understanding of the proper nature of philosophical thinking: Socrates does not ask for a definition but for the meaning of *to eusebes* and *to hosion*; his quest is not for a formal definition, however good it may be for specific purposes (and no definition can be good but for a strictly specified purpose), but for the reality we discover within our own mind when we turn that mind within to see what we mean. It is not an accident that Socrates invariably finds all definitions proffered inadequate; the refutation of each definition in turn is part of the process of leading the mind to look within: this is the intent of the elenchus, as it is the intent of all proper education as Plato was to say explicitly in the *Republic* (518b-c).

In spite of Socrates' careful formulation of his question, Euthyphro commits the same error as other interlocutors; instead of saying what piety is, he cites his own action as an exemplar of piety. But before showing him his error, Socrates has to attend to another issue, for Euthyphro has adduced in justification of his action the example of Zeus who bound his own father when the latter devoured his sons, and this latter himself had mutilated his own father (5d-6a). So Socrates first registers his disbelief in such immoral tales told about the gods, on account of which Plato was to launch his scathing attack in the *Republic* on the poets and artists who were influential in spreading such tales.

Then Socrates goes on with the business in hand. He explains: "Remember that I have not asked for one or two examples of the many

things that are pious, but for that idea itself by which all that is pious is pious", *ekeino auto to eidos hōi panta ta hosia hosia estin* (6d). In these few words we have the goal of the elenchus clearly brought out: the realization that it is by the idea in the mind that whatever is such is such, and the further realization that it is in the mind that we have all the reality we know and all the reality and all the worth that is properly ours. This is precisely Socrates' position in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo* where he affirms that the end of all rational endeavour is to rest in that beauty by which all that is beautiful is beautiful

Euthyphro now gives a formally good definition: What the gods approve of is pious; what they do not approve of is impious (6e-7a). Let us not tarry long by the *ad hominem* refutation Socrates offers first. For clearly, if the gods are constantly fighting and quarrelling among themselves, then what some of them may approve of, others may not approve of, and the same act would thus be pious and impious (7a-9b).

Prodged by Socrates, Euthyphro adopts an amendment to his definition: What the gods unanimously approve of is pious; what the gods unanimously disapprove of is impious (9d-e). Socrates' examination of this position has two dimensions: the one explicitly logical and fits well into the elenctic project; the other implicit and of ethical import and, to my mind, embodies a fundamental principle of the Socratic-Platonic philosophy.

Is the pious approved of by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because the gods approve of it? (10a.) Euthyphro cannot grasp the difference and Socrates has to explain at great length (10a-11b). We can get to the point with more economy. We say that the pious is what is approved of by the gods, or in other words, it is what the gods approve of. If that is so, then what we have given as the essential character of the pious is something that happens to it. A definition of this kind can in certain contexts be good for a specific purpose (what the law of a particular country enjoins, is, for the judge on the bench, just), but in seeking to understand the meaning of a concept, an approach from the outside does not take us to our goal. That is a constantly reiterated lesson of the elenchus.

But now for the profound principle that is only tangentially touched in this passage. The pious is what is approved of by the gods, and it is approved of because the gods approve of it. Now if the approval of the gods is arbitrary, then the pious is pious because the gods approve of it, and that is that. But if the gods approve of the pious because there is something in it worthy of approbation, if the gods approve of the pious because it is pious and not the other way round, then the Good is

binding on the gods and the Good is the source of all that is good. Here we have two diametrically opposed conceptions of morality, the morality of authority and the morality of autonomy. For Socrates and for Plato all reality is to be found within the mind and all value comes from within the mind.

That is what Kant also sought to affirm in his philosophy of the Categorical Imperative. Those who take Kant to task for making the morality of an act dependent on the Imperative misconstrue Kant and do him wrong. The Imperative in Kant simply indicates that the moral rightness of the act is intrinsic. The categorical imperative of morality is an autonomous imperative because it is an affirmation of the intrinsic value of the free will.

Euthyphro is lost; Socrates helps him out with a suggestion. Let us say that all that is pious is righteous (*dikaion*). But is all that is righteous pious, or some of it pious and some other than pious? Once more Euthyphro cannot follow and Socrates has to explain and gets him to agree that we may regard piety as part of righteousness (11e-12d). (Marginally we may note how Plato was laying down the foundations of logic which Aristotle was to systematize.) But what part of righteousness is piety? Euthyphro answers that piety is the part of righteousness that serves the gods; the rest of righteousness serves humans (12e). Socrates has no difficulty in showing that Euthyphro's notion of service is vague and that Euthyphro cannot give it any satisfactory content (13a-14a).

Euthyphro's last go does not fare any better. Piety is the art of giving offerings to the gods and asking of them in prayer. It is a kind of trade between gods and humans. Well, what we can receive from the gods is obvious, but what good can we render the gods? Honour and reverence and thanks. Piety then is simply rendering to the gods what is agreeable to them. And so we are driven back to the position which we have already found inadequate (14a-15c).

Euthyphro is too 'thick', his mind is too tightly fettered by conventional beliefs, to experience the liberating aporia brought about as a rule by Socrates' elenchus. Instead he ascribes his failure to answer Socrates' question to lack of time. He goes away as wise as he arrived.

Scholars often exert themselves to show that a dialogue of Plato's can be of interest 'despite its negative conclusion'. This is to stand the thing on its head and miss the whole point not only of the elenctic dialogues but of the entire work of Plato. The purpose of the Socratic elenchus is to make us realize that the meaning of any concept cannot be found in any extraneous conditions or relations but only in the self-evident reality of the living idea within the active, creative mind. The

purpose of the Platonic dialectic is to make us realize that no determinate formulation of thought can claim finality or be immune to contradiction.

MENO

The *Meno* probably stands chronologically at the head of the middle-period dialogues, but it incorporates a model miniature elenctic discourse (70a-79e). I think this should tell us that Plato not only never gave up any of the convictions or principles to be found in the early dialogues but also did not discard the form or the method. When he felt that he had sufficiently exploited one form or approach, he turned to a different form or approach, but he could always go back to the earlier form if he could put it to good use. Perhaps here we have the solution to the puzzle of Book I of the *Republic*. In form and content this opening part of the *Republic* is akin to the early elenctic dialogues, so that many scholars believe it was originally written during the early period as a separate dialogue and later on utilized as the initial part of the *Republic*. I think it possible that when Plato came to write the *Republic*, he purposely planned Book I as a typically elenctic discourse, because that served the overall plan of the work. But even on the theory that Book I was originally an early separate dialogue, that would still mean that Plato could yet put the old form to the same good old use.

The dialogue opens with the impetuous Meno abruptly asking Socrates, "Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is teachable? Or is it not to be taught but is acquired by practice? Or is it neither acquired by practice nor by learning, but is present in human beings by nature or by some other means?" (70a.)

Socrates says that, far from having a ready answer to that question, he cannot even say what virtue is. Meno finds that incredible. "Shall I carry back home that report of you, that you do not know what virtue is?" "Not only that, but also that I have never met one who does." "Did you not meet Gorgias when he was here? – Did he seem to you not to know?" (71a-c.)

Socrates suggests that we leave Gorgias out of it, since he is not present to answer for himself, but Meno presumably knows what Gorgias said and agrees with him. So, will Meno say what virtue is? Meno obliges with an ample review of assorted virtues: a man's, a woman's, a child's male or female, an old man's, and for all ranks and stations and in all kinds of situations there are virtues to choose from (71d-72a).

Socrates has to explain: I am in luck; I have asked you for one virtue and you have given me a swarm. But, seriously, making use of this metaphor of a swarm, if I asked you for the proper nature of a bee, *melittês peri ousias hoti pot' estin*, and you told me that there were all kinds of bees, I would then ask you if they differed from each other as bees. Meno agrees that as bees they would not differ (72a-c). We should note that Socrates is asking for the proper nature, the idea by which we characterize this or that particular thing as such or such; he is asking not for a formal definition but for clarification of what we mean by an idea. I insist on this in spite of the fact that, to make his interlocutor understand the kind of answer he is seeking, Socrates (or Plato) sometimes makes use of formal definitions, as in the present dialogue (74b-76d). Or, to put it somewhat differently, Socrates may take as the starting point of the elenchus the examination of a definition, but then the purpose of the elenchus is never to reach an improved or refined definition, but to probe the idea which is ostensibly being put forward for definition.

So with virtues, though they be many and various, they all have one character, *eidôs*, by which they are, all of them, virtues. But Meno still does not grasp clearly what Socrates is asking for, and even after Socrates gives the further examples of health and size and strength and Meno agrees that these are each of one character whether in man or woman, he still thinks the case of virtue is not the same (72c-73a).

Meno in giving his survey of virtues has said that a man's virtue was to manage the affairs of the city well and a woman's to manage those of her household well. Neither city nor household can be managed well without temperance and justice. Both woman and man, to be good, must have justice and temperance. Young boy and old man equally must be temperate and just. They are all good in the same way. They would not all be good in the same way if they did not all have the same virtue (73a-c). We are not yet into the elenchus. These are preliminaries to lead Meno to the idea of the single character we have to examine.

Meno now says that virtue is the ability to govern men. But if virtue is the same in everyone, shall we also say that it is the virtue of a child to govern, and the virtue of a slave to govern his master? Further, if virtue is to govern, should we not qualify that by adding 'to govern justly'? Meno agrees, for justice is virtue. Socrates asks, virtue or a virtue? Once more Meno does not grasp the distinction and Socrates has to explain (73c-e). Socrates' intention in posing the question is not merely logical, not simply to clarify the relation between what Aristotle was to call species and genus. Socrates' intention is, if I may be permitted an anachronism, metaphysical: to advance the notion of a

single idea by which all that is such is such. That is Socrates' primary object, to turn our attention to the realm of ideas which constitutes our proper being as human beings.

Meno acknowledges that there are other virtues beside justice, such as courage, temperance, wisdom, magnificence, and many others. So we are back to our earlier position; we have many virtues but not the single character by which they are all virtues (74a). Again Meno is in difficulty and it is at this point that Socrates, to help him out, gives his sample definitions, which I will not go into at this point because they are not relevant to the question of the elenchus.

Meno at last offers a new definition. Virtue, as the poet says, is, desiring fine things, to be able to obtain them (77b). To desire fine things is to desire what is good. But are there those who desire what is bad beside those who desire what is good? Don't all people desire what is good? No, says Meno; there are those who desire what is bad. Do they desire the bad, thinking it good, or do they, knowing it to be bad, still desire it? Both this and that, says Meno.

To desire something is to want to have it. To want to have it, thinking it beneficial to one, or knowing it to be harmful? Again Meno thinks that both cases are to be found. Those who think the bad beneficial, do they see it as bad? No. These then do not desire the bad, but what they think good though it is in fact bad; in desiring what they erroneously think good, their desire is for the good (77b6-e4). Those who desire the bad, thinking it harmful, do they know it will harm them? Necessarily. Those that are harmed think they are unhappy in so far as they are harmed. Is there anyone who wants to be unhappy? No one. Then no one desires the bad if no one wants to be unhappy (77e5-78b2).

Meno has said that virtue is to desire the good and be able to obtain it. But we have agreed that the desire for the good is common to all, so that no one is better than another in that respect. If anyone is better than another it will be in the ability to obtain the good. Meno's definition boils down to this: virtue is the ability to obtain what is good (78b3-c2). By good things we mean such things as health and wealth? Meno adds the possession of gold and silver and honour in the city and rule. Good things are nothing other than all such things. Virtue is the possession of such things: shall we qualify the possession by adding 'justly' and 'righteously', or will it still be virtue if these goods are obtained unjustly? No. Then along with the possession of goods we must have justice or temperance or righteousness or some other part of virtue; if not, then even if we have the ability to obtain the goods, it is not virtue. The failure to possess gold or silver where they cannot be obtained

justly, that failure is virtue. Then the ability to obtain such goods in itself, no more than the inability, is virtue: the ability and the inability alike, when accompanied by justice, are virtue; when lacking justice and the other virtues, are vice (78c3-79a2).

But a short while ago we said that justice and temperance and the like are parts of virtue. "Are you making fun of me, Meno?", Socrates remarks. We were seeking the nature of virtue as a whole; now we are saying that what is done with a part of virtue is virtue, as if we already knew what virtue is (79a-c). And so, as usual, we have got nowhere. We have proved nothing. We have defined nothing. Can anyone believe that Socrates and Plato were such fools, belabouring themselves to say nothing? If either Socrates or Plato entered into discourse with a view to reaching some conclusion, would it have been so difficult for either of them to work to some plausible conclusion, if only now and then? Socrates had one purpose, one mission; to shake his interlocutors out of their complacency and make them think and make them look within themselves. The intentions of Plato the artist, the composer of dialogues, were more complex. In each dialogue he had more than one target: drama, poetry, character-portraiture, parody, criticism — sometimes this element, sometimes that, but beneath all that and above all that was the continuation of the Master's mission: to provoke, to shock, to explode settled presuppositions and fossilized notions, to awaken the minds of his readers and make them discover the reality within themselves.

EUTHYDEMUS

The *Euthydemus* is not primarily an elenctic dialogue. Its main purpose seems to be to remove the popular confusion between the Socratic dialectic and the histrionics of eristics. So Plato juxtaposes his farcical portrayal of the antics of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus against the didactic dialogue of Socrates with Clinias. In the *Protagoras* Plato contrasts the method of Socrates with that of one of the ablest and most respected of the Sophists. In the *Gorgias* he pictures Socrates conversing with three Sophists of varying worth, from the venerable Gorgias through Polus to Callicles, and the character of the discussion differs with the interlocutor. In the two dialogues bearing the name of the pompous and vain but well-meaning Hippias, there is parody, but there is still serious content. In the *Euthydemus* the empty jabberings of the charlatan brothers and the serious conversation are not allowed to mix but run in parallel courses. And in this context it would

have been confusing to the young Clinias if he were subjected to the rigours of the proper elenchus. So in the first conversation with Clinias we have the thought and the principles that are always behind the elenchus and that the elenchus is intended to lead the interlocutor to find for himself, given in a forthright manner.

The task Socrates sets to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as a demonstration of their wisdom is to persuade the boy Clinias of the need to philosophize and cultivate virtue. When they have given the first display of their glossal legerdemain – pardon the mixed metaphor; a muddle is in place here –, Socrates explains to the boy the tricks they have so far employed, playing on the double meaning of ambiguous words; then he offers to give them a sample of the kind of conversation he wants from them. And so we have the first episode of Socrates' demonstration set against that of the two eristics.

Do all people want to fare well? Obviously. How do we fare well? Is it when we have lots of good things? This too seems obvious. What good things? All people would say wealth is good. Also health and a fine body and all bodily excellences. Again, good birth, and power, and honour among one's own are good. What about being temperate and just and courageous? These also are good things. And where shall we place wisdom? Among the good things (278e-279c).

But have we not left out the greatest of all goods? People say good fortune is the greatest of all goods. But on second thoughts, in saying this we are perhaps making a laughing-stock of ourselves. Because we have already included good fortune and are now repeating ourselves. Surely wisdom is good fortune. A professional flute-player is most successful in flute-playing. In writing and reading, in daring the dangers of the sea, in war, in treatment of disease, those succeed who have learned the art. So clearly wisdom is always accompanied by good fortune (279c-280a).

We have to stop here for a moment to say what we should have had no need to say if it were not that so much nonsense is being said about Plato and Socrates. Socrates has not been arguing, nor was he subjecting Clinias to the customary examination. Here to place the object of true dialectic in clear opposition to the object of empty eristics, 'Socrates' offers the boy thoughts and ideas that, in the proper elenchus, he would be left to find for himself.

Having led the boy to see that the idea of good fortune is empty and that what we need for success in any activity is not good fortune but wisdom, Socrates continues. We have agreed that if we have many good things we are happy and fare well. Would the possession of goods make us happy if they are not beneficial to us? Would they be

beneficial to us if we possess them but do not make use of them? Would food or drink benefit us if we have them but do not eat or drink? Would the practitioner of any trade benefit by the possession of tools and materials if these are not employed? If a person possessed wealth and all the goods we mentioned but made no use of them, would that person be made happy by the possession of those goods? It is necessary not only to have goods but also to make use of them if they are to make one happy. But is that sufficient for making one happy, to have goods and make use of them? We have to qualify our statement: goods make one happy if one makes use of them rightly. To make use of a thing wrongly is worse than making no use of it at all, the one is bad the other neither good nor bad. In all trades and all professions, right use comes from knowledge. Knowledge is the source not only of good fortune but also of success in all possession and all activity. Would any of the possessions we named as goods be of benefit without intelligence and wisdom? Would one benefit more by having many goods and no reason or by having a few goods with reason? One who is less active is less prone to making mistakes, less prone to doing wrong, and less prone to being wretched. A person is more likely to be less active if poor rather than rich; weak rather than strong; a coward rather than brave and bright; lazy rather than energetic; slow rather than swift; blunt of sight and hearing rather than sharp. So all the things we earlier thought to be good are not in themselves good; when directed by ignorance they are worse than their opposites; when directed by intelligence and wisdom, they are better, but in themselves they are no more good than bad. Of all other things, none is either good or evil; the good and evil are only these two: wisdom the only good, ignorance the only evil (280b-281e).

Since we all want to be happy, and we have seen that this comes from the right use of things, and right use comes from knowledge, then every one of us must seek by all means to be as wise as possible (282a). After getting Clinias to agree that one should stop at nothing in seeking wisdom, Socrates, as if by an afterthought, adds: if wisdom is teachable and does not come of its own to people; for this question we have not examined and it has not been agreed between us. Clinias says he believes it is teachable; Socrates thanks him for saving him the trouble of having to examine the question and admonishes him to philosophize (282c-d). Why did Plato feel it necessary to append this proviso to a conversation that seemed to go very well and to come to a satisfactory conclusion? I think the answer must be, just because it seemed to go so well and to come to a satisfactory conclusion. That was a didactic piece that was very good as far as it went, but would be harmful if it gave the

impression that the questions examined were that simple and that the affirmations made in the course of the conversation were adequate and that we could rest in them without further examination. If we have learnt our Plato well, then we will of course give good advice to our children, but we must also teach them to question our advice and place it under merciless scrutiny.

Having given Dionysodorus and Euthydemus the demonstration he promised to give of the manner in which he wants them to converse with Clinias, Socrates asks them either to discourse as he did or to take the thread up where he dropped it and explain to the boy whether he is to seek all knowledge or a particular kind of knowledge. But they would do neither; instead they carry on with their antics. This time however Socrates does not stop at baring their tricks as he did earlier, but confronts them more firmly to show how easily they can be brought to heel by one who can think for himself. When the discussion again threatens to turn into a row, Socrates offers to resume his conversation with Clinias as an example of what he 'hopes' to get from the two brothers (282d-288d).

Socrates now addresses Clinias, and in what follows we move closer to the essence of the true elenchus. We agreed that we need to philosophize. Philosophy is the possession of knowledge. What knowledge would it be right for us to possess? Is it not that knowledge which would benefit us? Would it benefit us to know how to discover in what spots of the earth we can dig up most gold? Possibly. But we have agreed that the possession of gold would not benefit us if we did not know how to make use of it. Neither would the knowledge of business management or medicine or whatever benefit us without the knowledge of how to make use of them. Nor even if we knew how to make ourselves or others immortal would that benefit us if we did not know how to make use of that immortality. We need a knowledge in which knowing how to do things and knowing how to make use of the things we do are conjoined. We can leave out the knowledge of making lyres and flutes and such things, for here knowing how to make the thing and knowing how to make use of it are separate (288d-289c).

What if we had the knowledge of making speeches, would that make us happy? Clinias doesn't think so. Why? Some speech-makers do not know how to make use of their speeches, while others who do not know how to make them do make use of them, so here too the making and the use are separate (289c-d). We may say that this is a very lame explanation. Socrates could have explained that the speech-makers do not necessarily know whether their speeches when successful would be conducive to their real good; but this would take

the conversation beyond the framework set for it in the present context. This should show us how we go wrong when we read the content of Plato's works superficially, without taking account of the dramatic context.

Where shall we find the knowledge that would make us happy? Could it be the knowledge of the general? No. The general is a kind of hunter. Hunters, fishers, and the like, when they have their quarry, hand it over to the cook to make use of it. So also geometricians and arithmeticians hand over their findings to the dialectician if they have any sense. [This is not the place for commenting on this explosive aside of Plato's.] So likewise, the general when he has captured a city does not know what to make of it and hands it over to the statesman. If we want to find that knowledge which besides knowing how to secure its object also knows how to make use of it and in doing so makes us happy, then we have to look elsewhere (290b-d).

By a dramatic ruse, Plato makes Socrates assign these sophisticated explanations to Clinias. This incites Crito, to whom Socrates is relating the conversation, to interrupt the narration at this point. Crito is incredulous: did the boy say all that? Socrates dodges; perhaps it was Ctesippus; perhaps someone wiser. Anyway, Crito inquires, did you continue the search and did you find that knowledge you were seeking? (290e-291a.)

Socrates' answer to Crito's question is highly significant: How could we? We were really laughable, repeatedly thinking we were on the point of laying our hands on the knowledge we sought, when again it escaped us. We came at last in our search to the kingly art and inquired whether that was the knowledge that provided happiness, only to find that we have fallen into a labyrinth: always, thinking we had reached our goal, we took a turn and found ourselves where we had been at the beginning and had to start the search all over again (291b-c). Here Plato gives us an exact description of the elenctic process: it never gets and is never meant to get to a conclusion. This is of a piece with what Plato was to say about the impropriety of encapsulating philosophical thought in determinate linguistic formulations and with what he was to say in the *Republic* of the highest knowledge and of dialectic.

Socrates continues. We took the kingly art to be one with the political art. To this all the other arts render their fruits to be used for the general good. Now the kingly art, having control of all these goods, what does it do for us? For if it is the knowledge we are seeking, it must somehow be beneficial to us. But in the earlier conversation with Clinias we had found that the only good is knowledge. All other things which the political art may be supposed to secure for us – wealth,

security, peace, etc. – we have found to be neither good nor bad in themselves. The political art must make us wise and give us knowledge if it is to benefit us and make us happy. Does the kingly art make people wise and good? What knowledge does it give us? It cannot be any of the special kinds of knowledge that we found producing things that are neither good nor bad in themselves. It must be a knowledge that gives us nothing but itself. Shall we say it is a knowledge by which we make others good? Good at what or for what? Good for making yet others good and so on? Good in what way? We seem to be as far as ever from finding the kind of knowledge that would make us happy (291c-292e). So we reach the customary aporia of the elenctic discourse. I believe Plato chose to give us this part of the discussion off-stage as it were because it would not have gone well dramatically into the demonstration Socrates was giving to the eristic brothers. They would not have understood its serious intent and would only have found in it material for their buffoonery.

From this point on, except for the closing conversation between Socrates and Crito, the *Euthydemus* turns into broad burlesque. By picturing the two brothers making fun of everything and everybody, Plato is making fun of them and their wisdom.

HIPPIAS MAJOR

The two Hippias dialogues are often misunderstood because enough weight is not given to the dramatic element in them. Both the *Hippias Major* and the *Hippias Minor* are, in my opinion, intended mainly to mock the vain and pompous Hippias, so that, particularly in the *Hippias Major*, it is more rewarding to study the dialogue as a drama than to examine the intercourse for following the steps of the elenctic process, except towards the end, where we can again pick up the first basic principle of the elenchus: an idea cannot be explained by or reduced to anything extraneous to it; in the end we have to rest content with the insight that it is by the idea of beauty – engendered in the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind – that all beautiful things are beautiful.

The *Hippias Major* is commonly regarded as a 'definition' dialogue. While it is generally remarked that it is one of the simplest in form, I have not seen anyone commenting on the long introductory conversation between Socrates and Hippias, which is seemingly without connection with the central subject of the dialogue. I think that this introductory conversation should tell us that the *Hippias Major* was

intended mainly as a criticism of the Sophist movement in general and of Hippias in particular. Hippias is quite helpless in the face of Socrates' charge that he (Hippias) was most successful in the least well-governed of Hellenic societies and least welcome in the best-governed, which cared for the pursuit of virtue, and is insensate to Socrates' sarcasm. When Socrates turns to the subject of beauty (286c-e), picking the word from Hippias's encomium of his own composition, Plato easily manages to show that Hippias, far from knowing what he is talking about, cannot even understand Socrates' question. The discourse about beauty has a dual purpose: to show what an idiot Hippias was, and, in the last portion, in common with the properly elenctic discourses, to show that we cannot encompass a pure idea in any determinate formulation. In a proper elenchus, this produces the creative aporia which leads the mind to look within itself, but with Hippias it leads to nothing; he remains as full of himself as ever.

Plato makes Hippias so dumb that when Socrates has asked in precise terms, *auto to kalon hoti esti*;, Hippias still thinks the question a trite one, and gives the kind of answer one would give when a little child, hearing the word 'beautiful' for the first time asks, What is beautiful?, and you might then point to a flower and say, This flower is beautiful.

In 287c-d we have a very clear statement of what the quest of Socrates was all about. Is it not by justice that the just are just? Then justice is something (or, then there is such a thing as justice). Also, it is by wisdom that the wise are wise, and by goodness that all good things are good. Then there are such things as wisdom and goodness. And is it not by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful? Then there is such a thing as beauty. So, what is this beauty? In dealing with these and similar phrases in the dialogues, translators have done unspeakable harm by using the words 'exist' and 'existence'. What Socrates wants to bring out is that in speaking of justice, goodness, beauty, and the like, we are not uttering empty words – there is a meaning, a notion, an idea, that we can meaningfully speak of apart from the many actual instances of justice, goodness, beauty, and the like. And it is this meaning in our mind that Socrates is concerned to explore. (We say: 'in the mind'; the 'in' here is no less a culprit than the 'is' which gives rise to 'exists'. Such are the pitfalls of all articulate speech.)

After all this explanation, Hippias is still unable to see any difference between the question, What is beautiful?, and, What is beauty? He needs much more coaxing and pampering than any of the young boys in the other dialogues, and in the end comes out with his gem, a beautiful girl is beauty.

The responses that Plato gives Hippias in the *Hippias Major* are not such as to help explore the idea of beauty. A. E. Taylor sees this as an indication that Plato's interest there was logical rather than ethical. I do not find this convincing. Plato elsewhere introduces fine logical distinctions and ideas without having to make the interlocutor such an imbecile as to say that that which by its presence makes a thing beautiful is gold, when he had just given as an example of beauty a beautiful girl and agreed that a fine horse is beautiful. When Hippias says that to live in opulence and honour and be given a regal funeral by one's children is beautiful, Socrates hints very broadly that he deserves to be given a beating for giving this answer, and yet Hippias is so insensate as not to get the hint. (Whether this is fair to the historical Hippias or not is another question: we are here concerned with the *persona* of the dialogue.) To me it is obvious that the two Hippias dialogues are primarily intended to mock the ignorant vanity of Hippias, who is in a worse state than even the charlatan brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*, who know what they are, while Hippias doesn't. To say this is not to deny that Plato could make the two dialogues serve other serious purposes.

At last at 293d, having shown Hippias incapable of giving any answer worthy of serious examination, Plato makes Socrates (under the guise of the fictional rude fellow) help by suggesting some formally plausible answers just to give the conversation some content.

At 294b, in a parenthetical remark, Plato clearly indicates the true end of the Socratic elenchus — it is as if he were inadvertently letting slip the secret of the elenchus riddle. "We seek that by which all beautiful things are beautiful — just as that by which all big things are big, [namely] excess; it is by that that all big things are big, whether they appear so or not, yet they exceed, necessarily there is bigness in them." I do not believe that Plato fancied himself giving something like a mathematical definition of bigness. He must have been aware that in using *tôî huperechonti* he was merely employing a verbal variation. In the end we have to acknowledge — and the purpose of the elenchus is to make us acknowledge — that when we seek to give an articulate formulation to the nature of beauty or justice and the like, we are seeking the impossible, and that we only find our way to true understanding when we understand that it is only by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful — that true understanding is only to be found in the self-evidence of the ideas engendered in the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind — understanding in fact is nothing but the luminosity of the active, creative mind.

At 294c Hippias amends his answer, saying that the appropriate both makes things beautiful and makes them appear to be beautiful. The phrase 'appear to be' can be taken in either of two senses. If taken to mean 'are seen to be', the statement is formally unobjectionable. But in the alternative we have been considering appearance was taken to be opposed to reality, and taken in that sense, the statement would be contradictory: a thing cannot both be and appear to be, in other words, be simultaneously genuine and fake. But Socrates chooses to give Hippias the benefit of the doubt and take his statement in the permissible sense, and goes on to show that in that sense it is not universally true.

The alternative view that the appropriate is what makes beautiful things beautiful is not examined since Hippias, although Socrates repeatedly puts it under his nose, refuses to take it up. Had Hippias adopted the suggestion, Socrates would have gone on to show the ambiguity of the idea of the appropriate.

At 295c Socrates again proposes, on behalf of Hippias, another plausible answer. Whatever is useful is beautiful. Socrates is simply picking up for examination common ideas, embedded in the very texture of Hellenic speech, such as any interlocutor more alive than Hippias would come up with unprompted. I find it simply incomprehensible that any serious scholar should conclude from this that Socrates had a utilitarian conception of beauty or whatever.

Scholars who find in Socrates' 'arguments' in the *Hippias Major* evidence now of his utilitarianism and now of his hedonism are simply closing their eyes to the context in which these 'arguments' are introduced. Socrates is surveying answers that might be suggested, only to find them unsatisfactory. Surely anyone of us will readily agree that a tool is fine if it serves its purpose, without being a utilitarian, and anyone of us will say that a delicious meal is fine, without being a hedonist or even necessarily a gourmet.

Having demolished his own 'utilitarian' hypothesis, Socrates now advances the idea of identifying the beautiful with aesthetic pleasure (in our modern sense of the term) – the pleasure found in fine sights and fine sounds (297e-298a). Again, there are those who find in this support for what is seen as Socrates' hedonism, not taking into account that Socrates puts forward the idea only to show that it is unsatisfactory. And this is not to deny that in Socrates' view of the good life there was room for pleasure; but there is a wide chasm between saying that pleasure is good and holding that pleasure is the good.

At 298b-c Plato underlines for us the dramatic purpose of the dialogue, portraying the vain and pompous Hippias, who has no goal

other than monetary gain and empty verbal victory over an adversary, even by dishonest means, in contrast with Socrates who has to give account of himself to himself.

When 'Socrates' digresses into the discussion (300b-302b) of a property that can be true of a pair collectively but not of each member of the pair, and vice versa, I believe that is intended by Plato further to mock Hippias's ignorance and slow wits. Important as the point is, logically, with a different interlocutor Plato would have explained it in a couple of sentences instead of in two full pages.

HIPPIAS MINOR

Many scholars have found the *Hippias Minor* perplexing because, they say, Socrates there argues for a conclusion which contradicts a position which he affirms elsewhere. They have forgotten about Socrates' famous irony. Socrates fits his discourse to his interlocutor. I feel that Plato's portraiture in this particular was faithful to the original. And if in the *Hippias Major* Plato chose to laugh at Hippias openly, in the *Hippias Minor*, to uncover the pompous vanity of Hippias, Plato makes him assent to an impossible paradox. There is nothing formally wrong in Socrates' assertion that a liar or deceiver who knows what he is doing is intellectually superior to one who lies or deceives out of ignorance. But Socrates could easily have gone on to show that one who 'knowingly' (consciously, intentionally) lies or deceives does so from motives (fear, greed, etc.) that show him ignorant of the real good. The *Hippias Minor* is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hippias's contention that Achilles was good but a fool while Odysseus was wise but vicious. The paradox re-worded would read: a wise deceiver is an impossibility.

Conclusion

Socrates solemnly declares his life-mission to be to exhort all humans to care for the health of their souls above everything else. What part does the elenchus play in that mission? Since *psuchê* was for Socrates one with *nous* and its proper excellence was *phronêsis*, the removal of all that encumbers, befogs, or deceives the mind was a necessary step towards caring for one's soul. For people to care for their souls they had to be shown that their true good lay nowhere but in the goodness of their souls and that the goodness of the soul was nothing other than sound *phronêsis*. They had to be led to discover their true nature and their proper excellence. That could not be given to them in

any ready-made formula; they had to find it within themselves. That is the function of the elenchus; that is why Socrates who cared for nothing but virtue spent his life engaging in seemingly fruitless theoretical refutations.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROTAGORAS

Overview

THE *PROTAGORAS* IS, BY COMMON CONSENT, a dramatic masterpiece. I would say without hesitation that the *Protagoras* represents the acme of Plato's dramatic mastery. And it is not only incidentally a drama; it is primarily a drama, and we fail to understand it properly if we fail to see it as such. It is mainly, though not exclusively (no dialogue of Plato is exhausted by a single theme or a single objective) a portrayal of the most prominent Sophist and of two lesser luminaries of the movement.

The intricate dramatic preliminaries of the *Protagoras* indicate that Plato's intention was to contrast the wisdom of Socrates with that of the deservedly most renowned of the professional Sophists. Accordingly, both in the prefatory conversation with the friend to whom Socrates is relating the encounter and in the introductory narration, Plato gives an effective dramatic representation of the esteem and the infatuation with which Protagoras was surrounded.

But while the dramatic excellence of the *Protagoras* is universally acknowledged, its philosophical importance is underestimated. W. K. C. Guthrie, in the Introduction to his translation of the *Protagoras* and the *Meno* (Penguin, 1956) writes, "But in proportion as it excites our admiration as a literary work, so the *Protagoras* perplexes those who would extract its philosophical lesson" (p.8). The perplexity comes from the unwarrantable expectation to find a ready-made "philosophical lesson". In answer to the central question of the *Protagoras* about the teachability of virtue, the dialogue pits the soul-searching Socratic examination against the dogmatic inculcation of the Sophists. It does not hand out a "philosophical lesson" but affords an exercise in philosophical thinking, which is the true way to genuine virtue according to Socrates and Plato. When Socrates said at his trial that he never taught or meant to teach anybody (*Apology*, 19d), that

was no false pretence. His mission was not to teach but to waken his interlocutors' slumbering minds and make them think for themselves — a mission to which Plato was equally dedicated.

The *Protagoras* is not, strictly, an elenctic dialogue. It does not examine a proposed answer to a 'What is ...?' question. (I have explained elsewhere why I refuse to use the now academically sanctioned 'What is *F*?'). Its argument is more complex. In deference to Protagoras, most of the critical give and take is carried on with a fictional third party. And while the thrust of the central argument is to vindicate Socrates' twin claim of the unity of virtue and the identity of virtue with knowledge, the argument stops short of posing the complementary question 'What knowledge?' which invariably ends in aporia — that fructifying aporia which gives birth to philosophical ignorance and the realization that for philosophical insight we have to look within our own minds.

The *Protagoras* does not seek to refute any basic tenet advanced by Protagoras. Protagoras maintains that virtue is teachable, and Socrates shows that, to be teachable, virtue must be of the nature of wisdom and knowledge — which agrees with Socrates' lifelong conviction, and also agrees with Protagoras' declared position, albeit only formally and superficially, for the knowledge which Socrates finds identical with virtue is not the kind of knowledge imparted by Protagoras and the Sophists.

The preliminary conversation of Socrates with Hippocrates (311b-312e) is an example of the critical examination aiming at clarifying the interlocutor's thought and clearing away hazy ideas and ungrounded assumptions.

Hippocrates rouses Socrates from sleep at dawn. He wants Socrates to introduce him to Protagoras, with whom he is eager to enrol as a student. As it is too early, Socrates suggests that they walk about the courtyard and converse until it is time to go. Socrates asks Hippocrates what he expects to achieve by getting instruction from a Sophist? Hippocrates has no clear idea. The conversation leads to the point where it is suggested that a Sophist may be a kind of vendor of the goods on which the soul is nourished. Here we already have a hint at the main theme of the *Protagoras*. What are these goods? A preliminary answer might be *sophia* or *epistêmê*. (At this point Socrates uses *mathêmata*, which comes to the same thing. For an answer of a wider span we will have to wait for the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*.) But not the knowledge provided by the Sophists, any more than the knowledge in the possession of the various specialists. It is just knowledge and not any particular knowledge: it is the act, the activity,

the life of intelligence. This is the insight that Socrates never tired of intimating and trying to put through, and to which Plato at the zenith of his creative powers gave mythical expression in the master works of the middle period.

Next we have a lively description of their arrival at Callias's house where Protagoras and other visiting Sophists are staying. Socrates introduces Hippocrates and asks Protagoras on the lad's behalf what he may expect to gain from Protagoras' instruction. Protagoras claims that he teaches his student how best to manage his private affairs and the affairs of the state. Socrates expresses some doubt as to the teachability of that and gives his reasons for that doubt.

The axial theme of the teachability of virtue which has already been adumbrated in the preliminary discussion with Hippocrates, is broached at the start of the conversation with Protagoras (320b-c). But we should not forget that throughout the *Protagoras* we have two different conceptions of virtue which alternately take the stage without being distinctly differentiated. Protagoras professes to teach the virtue required for political success. Socrates gives reasons that make it seem doubtful that this virtue is teachable. Protagoras' answer to Socrates' doubts is reasonable, considering that Protagoras only claims to teach the skills and excellences needed for success in administering a citizen's private and public affairs, and considering further that so far we are only dealing with virtue at that level that Plato elsewhere characterizes as demotic. This is part of the drama; it contributes to giving a realistic portrait of Protagoras, his manner and his life. But then Socrates shifts the argument to virtue in a different sense — the virtue Socrates is concerned with.

It would be a mistake to think that the Socratic examination following Protagoras' grand speech was intended as a repudiation or refutation of the ideas presented in the speech. Socrates takes the discussion to a new level. He does not address any of the ideas advanced by Protagoras, least of all his main contention that virtue is teachable. Instead, Socrates picks up Protagoras' casual mention of distinct virtues and the underlying assumption that they somehow form a single entity and proceeds from there. Socrates' examination does not overturn the view presented by Protagoras but complements and deepens it.

It is also wrong to regard the heuristic doubt about the teachability of virtue advanced by Socrates as expressing his position on the question. Socrates was proposing the question for investigation and he was saying in effect: one would conclude, from observing the behaviour of Athenians and from the goings-on in society that our

people do not think virtue teachable. To quote the words of the dialogue where Socrates says, "I did not think this to be teachable", as evidence of Socrates' position is simplistic. That some scholars should say in all seriousness that the *Protagoras* is perplexing because Socrates here argues against a position he holds in other dialogues, is something beyond my comprehension. In any case, the true position of Socrates on the question could not be given in a simple yes or no, for Socrates all his life long was trying to show that the 'knowledge' that is one with virtue is not a knowledge that can be taught in the same way as other kinds of knowledge are taught. And everything in the *Protagoras* from beginning to end is consistent with that.

Where Socrates argues directly against Protagoras is not in relation to the main lines of Protagoras' speech but in relation to the answer given by Protagoras to the question posed by Socrates, contending that the distinct virtues differ from each other and – later on in the discussion – that courage differs most of all from knowledge. And Socrates' arguments do not prove the unity of virtue or the identity of virtue and knowledge – which, I maintain, cannot be proved demonstratively – but shows the incoherence of the view of the separateness and disparity of the virtues. Socrates' argument succeeds in making Protagoras concede the kinship and affinity of four of the virtues named. But there remains the nutty case of the courage-wisdom pair, which seem to be, at least at times and under certain circumstances, at odds with each other.

One such circumstance is where one, seemingly knowing what is good nevertheless does what is not good, being overpowered by desire or fear or the like — the famous problem of *akrasia*. Socrates focuses on the presumed experience of being overpowered by pleasure, because this particular experience is the source of much misunderstanding; he examines the question at length and shows that what happens then is that one makes a wrong judgement or fails to make the necessary judgement. Socrates then proceeds to the special case of being overcome by fear and shows that in the case of want of courage too, what happens is that one makes an erroneous judgement about values. Courage is knowledge of what is truly to be desired and what is truly to be feared. The gist of the whole discussion is just what Socrates has been teaching throughout his life, that the excellence we should seek is the knowledge of what constitutes our true worth as human beings.

The denial of *akrasia* is a corollary of the moral philosophy of Socrates. When Socrates says that no one does anything bad voluntarily, he is only affirming what Spinoza was to affirm in distinguishing between action and passion: only when we behave in

accord with reason can we be properly said to act; when we behave contrary to reason we are not acting but being driven this way and that way by forces that are foreign to our proper character (I was tempted to say 'our proper form') as human beings.

I

The first question we posed in our inquiry was whether virtue is teachable (320b-c). In giving his positive answer to the question, Protagoras mentioned justice, reasonableness, piety, and so on, speaking of all these as virtue (320c8-328d2). This gives rise to the question: are justice and reasonableness and piety and the rest parts of the one virtue, or are these different names for one and the same thing? (329c-d.)

Plato's distrust of the written word, which is to take special dimensions in later works, is clearly voiced in Socrates' likening of Sophists who cannot critically examine their own thoughts to fixed texts, *biblia*, and likening these in turn to gongs which keep reverberating the same sound until someone silences them (329a). Thought for Plato is a living thing that can never be constrained into the fixed mould of definitively formulated propositions, theories, and the like. But this is a point I deal with at length elsewhere.

Why was it necessary that the question of the teachability of virtue should resolve itself into the question of the unity of virtue? Socrates had so to resolve the question because so long as we confine our thought to the several virtues as each distinct from the others, we remain on the surface of things where Protagoras' account of the teachability of virtue holds good. But when we probe deeper to see what gives all those virtues the unique character of virtue – Socrates' lifelong quest – we find that the rearing of virtue in the soul requires a radically different conception of teaching and teachability.

Protagoras says that justice, temperance, and piety are distinct parts of virtue and not mere synonyms. When Socrates asks if they are parts in the same way as mouth, nose, eyes, ears, are parts of the face or as the parts of gold are parts of gold, this is intended to exclude the quantitative sense of 'part', which has no application where we are dealing with a non-material thing. Let us say they are parts as mouth, nose, etc., are parts of the one face. At 329e Socrates moves on to the next crucial question. Is it the case that some people participate in certain virtues and others in others, or is it necessary that whoever has one of the parts of virtue must have the whole of virtue? This of course

is the question that leads to one of the main insights of Socrates' moral philosophy: true virtue is indivisible. Where we think that we can have certain virtues without the others, that is because our common notions of virtue are confused and because we do not probe deep enough. We properly and legitimately speak of distinct virtues because the one proper perfection of a human being when manifested in different situations assumes different shapes, but if we take these differences to be in any way final, we find that leading to contradictoriness in our thinking. That is just what the Socratic elenchus reveals. And that is not contradicted by our common experience: we all know individuals who are honest but have one weakness or another, and even more, every one of us knows oneself to be very far from all-round goodness. There is no problem there: we are all imperfect specimens of humanity. Perhaps the virtue described by Socrates is something humanity has to work to through aeons of time.

Again Protagoras opts for the 'commonsense' answer: some people may have a certain virtue preeminently but be completely bereft of others and even have the opposite vices. We miss the whole spirit of the Socratic elenchus if we see his examination of such a position as a formal refutation of a proposition. What the Socratic elenchus does is to reveal to the interlocutor that such 'common wisdom' is incoherent, that our common judgements and distinctions are replete with contradictions, and that when our thoughts are examined carefully and profoundly, we are always led to or put on the way to a single original source of all value and all truth.

At 330c in eight simple words we have a question that has kept the minds of professional philosophers spinning to the present day: *hê dikaiosunê pragma ti estin ê ouden pragma*; It is interesting to compare different translations of this syntactically and semantically very simple sentence. Such a comparison shows at once that the notion of a simple sentence is highly ambiguous. The moment we step out of the sphere of mundane practicalities, we can safely assert that no meaningful sentence ever has a hard and fixed meaning. Every meaningful sentence is capable of limitless interpretations. Here Socrates asks: Is justice some thing or no thing? We can readily agree it is not a mere sound. Beyond that, the whole history of philosophy can be woven around this question. Plato's work in his middle and late periods can be seen as a sustained endeavour to probe this simple question. Socrates' unequalled value for human thought resides in the fact that, while he seemingly leaves us nothing but unanswered questions, in his handling of those questions he reveals to us the insights that inspired his life and that

constitute a most precious heritage we have not yet learnt to value properly.

Then a few lines below that, we have another question which, in its pristine innocence walks unabashed in its unsoiled nakedness, but once it tastes the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it beholds its own nakedness and seeks to no avail to cover its shame. *touto to pragma ... hê dikaiosunê, auto touto dikaion estin ê adikon*; (330c). What could be more natural than that justice should have the character of justice? Originally, language is an outgoing of one mind, reaching out to another. It transports an attitude, a sentiment from one mind to another. But when the outgoing impulse is intercepted and subjected to questioning, it stammers and stutters and is infected with falsity and contradiction. So here the simple question innocently put and innocently answered has no falsity in it. But when subjected to the sophistications of logicians, it breeds the Third Man, and Russell's paradox, and the quandaries of self-predication. But this is a topic I deal with elsewhere.

The argument in 332d1-333b6, from 'one opposite', for the identity of *sôphrosunê* and *sophia* – whether it is to be credited to Socrates or to Plato – is not to be made much of as a formal argument. Like all argument, as I maintain, it can be shown to be flawed, because it depends on the ambiguity of the term 'folly' — the folly that is opposed to wisdom is not quite the same thing as the folly opposed to temperance. But taken in a liberal spirit it is as good as any philosophical argument can be. I maintain that no philosophical argument can be conclusive in the same sense as a purely formal inference can be. Only dead and dry symbols can be the subject-matter of valid inference. All living thought has the fluidity of all life. Its real value is in showing that in our minds we do find a kinship between different particular virtues, so that it is not possible to regard the distinctions we make between them as final or ultimate. It is a pointer to the Socratic conception of all virtue, all excellence, as a mode of intelligence.

At 333a Socrates, concluding an argument, says: *houtoi gar hoi logoi amphoteroi ou panu mousikôs legontai' ou gar sunaidousin oude sunarmottousin allêlois*. Plato often uses the metaphors of music and harmony for thought, with very good reason. In the strictest sense, philosophical thought has the aesthetic intelligibility of a symphony rather than the inferential consequentiality of a mathematical demonstration. This is a truth that philosophers – even the best among them – have found it hard to absorb, to their detriment.

The proper end of all philosophical argument is not to examine abstract propositions and theories but to examine ourselves: *ton gar logon egôge malista exetazô, sumbainei mentoi isôs kai eme ton erôtônta, kai ton apokrinomenon exetazesthai* (333c). Socrates will examine the proposition, and in examining it will be examining both himself and his interlocutor. This is his life mission, to see that the ideas we hold are clear and form a harmony and are fully ventilated by the values and ideals to which we all pay lip-service. For this is the bane of all humankind, that we keep our ideals, values, principles and beliefs in hermetically sealed compartments, and as a result, each individual of us is not one person but several persons who behave in different circumstances and towards different people on the basis of quite different principles.

When the examination of the question of the unity of virtue is resumed at 349a, the upshot of the examination in the *Protagoras*, as in the elenctic dialogues generally, is that the concepts of the individual virtues cannot be kept in isolation. The moment we try to understand the meaning of any of these concepts, we find it merging into others. (I keep apart the question of the identity of virtue and knowledge for the moment.) Perhaps that is as far as Socrates went, but I think that Plato saw that the same is true of all concepts. To be serviceable at all a concept must somehow be distinct, must have a *horos*, not a 'definition' but a boundary. But when we sound it, when we try to make it intelligible, we find that it is only meaningful in its interrelatedness to everything else; it is only intelligible in fusion with the whole of the intelligible realm. That is the basis of the Platonic dialectic, and that is, in my view, the prime lesson of the *Lysis* and the *Parmenides*. In thinking, we have no alternative but to think in terms of definite concepts; in communicating we have to communicate in a language using definite words; but when we probe into our thought and into our language, we find that the definiteness and distinctness is delusive, and except for humdrum practical purposes, whenever we lose sight of the delusiveness of all thought and all language, we are led into error. That is why the Leibnizean dream of a perfect language is a mirage. That is why the Fregean *hubris* of symbolic logic which has so besotted certain academic philosophers that they try to use it not as a convenient shorthand but as a method for reaching positive conclusions and establishing definitive truth has done and continues to do incalculable harm in philosophy.

II

At 333b8-c1 Socrates tries to move on to an important element in his moral philosophy when he poses the question, *ara tis soi dokei adikôn anthrôpos sôphronein, hoti adikei*; So, can people be acting reasonably when they are perpetrating an injustice? (333d.) Let us see. To act reasonably is to act wisely. Do we say they act wisely when, in consequence, they fare well or when they fare ill? — And the argument would have proceeded as in the elenctic dialogues. But Protagoras is not being cooperative. Asked if we are to understand by good things, things that are beneficial to humans, he takes to flight in a long survey of things that can be called good even if they are not specifically beneficial to humans.

Socrates protests; Protagoras is unwilling to continue the discussion on the lines of Socrates' familiar method; the meeting threatens to break up. At last it is agreed that Protagoras should assume the role of questioner. Protagoras transfers the discussion to poetry and proposes a poem of Simonides for criticism.

From this point onwards up to 348c when the Socratic examination is resumed, the dialogue becomes a portrayal, with a touch of parody, of the character and methods of fifth-century Sophists, represented by three prominent figures, namely, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias. As A. E. Taylor puts it, "Hence I think we should take the whole of this long interlude as intended mainly to be humorous 'relief,' a gay picture of the manners of cultivated Athenian society in the later years of the Periclean age, and not much more" (*Plato: The Man and his Work*, 1926, p.251).

But Socrates' exegetic virtuosity in giving his exposition of the poem of Simonides is not merely a parody of the Sophistic manner; it is also a lively demonstration of the fault Plato finds in all learning from a dead text. The episode adequately demonstrates that, with sufficient dexterity, anyone can derive any meaning from any text. We should note that all of the audience — representing the intellectual élite of the Hellenic world — accept Socrates' violence to the text without demur. Again, of Socrates' exposition of the poem, Taylor writes, "Clearly we are dealing with an amusing 'skit' on the current methods of extracting any doctrine one pleases from a poet by devices which can make anything mean anything" (p.256). In our own day, Islamic scholars, to demonstrate the scientific miraculousness of the Koran, are deriving — seemingly in all seriousness — all the latest astrophysical, chemical, genetical, etc., etc., theories and discoveries from verses of the Koran.

Socrates epitomizes the difference between his method and that of the Sophists in one sentence: candid give and take in conversation is one thing and public haranguing another, *chôris gar egôg' ôimên einai to suneinai te allêlois dialogomenous kai to dêmégorein* (336b).

In 336b-d Alcibiades, true to character, pictures the whole encounter in terms of a contest for personal victory — yet another detail in the dramatic excellence of the *Protagoras*.

III

At last at 349b Socrates works his way back to the subject of virtue. He recapitulates: we had inquired whether wisdom and temperance and courage and justice and piety are five names for the one thing, virtue, or are distinct parts of virtue. And Protagoras' answer was that they are parts, not in the way that parts of gold are parts, similar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, but as the parts of the face are parts, unlike the whole and unlike each other. Protagoras now answers that all of those excellences are parts of virtue and that four of them are fairly close to each other, but that courage is quite different from the others. He asserts that you will find many people who are unjust, impious, wanton, and foolish, but who are yet most courageous. This position posits a serious challenge to the Socratic principle of the unity of all virtue and of the identity of virtue and knowledge.

Protagoras gives a perfectly sound logical proof of his proposition that courage is different from wisdom. The proof is formally flawless: it would be unshakeable — if we could agree what we mean by courage and by wisdom. Unfortunately, no word in any language comes with a definite meaning eternally glued to it. Only terms artificially fixed for specific purposes can have some permanence of meaning and that at a terrible price. The dream of a perfect language is worse than a chimera; if it were ever realized it would be the end of all living thought. So when Socrates proceeds to argue against Protagoras' position, he does not refute it. Instead, he offers a different conception of courage and wisdom, in which courage and wisdom are inseparable. It is not the business of philosophical thinking to obtain or to provide provable truth, but to offer a creative vision that sheds meaning on the givennesses of experience.

Let us examine the claim that courage is different from wisdom. The courageous are confident and go headlong where others fear to go. Certain individuals dive into wells with confidence. Professional divers do that, since they have the necessary knowledge. Likewise in other

areas, those who have the relevant knowledge act with greater confidence than those who don't and they themselves are more confident after acquiring knowledge than before. But there are others who, without knowledge, venture into those areas confidently. Are those also courageous? Courage would be an ugly thing if we were to say that, for those individuals are mad. So, it's knowledge that makes the difference, and it would appear that knowledge is courage (349e-350c).

Protagoras is not slow to criticize the logic of Socrates' argument (350c6-351b2). We should note here that when Plato introduces a logically deficient argument, he is not unaware of the deficiency, and does not mean the argument to be taken for a valid demonstration or proof. The function of the argument is to reveal connections, unfold implications, clarify ideas, and form part of the total picture. Our professional philosophers who write learned works to show the error of such arguments are wasting what is more valuable than their time; they are wasting the true sense of Plato's work. Still, I would add that, even formally, the objection of Protagoras to Socrates' argument (from the admission that the courageous are confident) is not just. Socrates does not need for his argument the premise that the confident are courageous (which Protagoras shows to be flawed). Protagoras admitted that the courageous are confident. Socrates says that their confidence may be accompanied either by knowledge or by ignorance, and it is only when accompanied by knowledge that it is good. If we are to think of courage always as good, then it must be the courage that is inseparable of knowledge. I think this is good reasoning, whatever we may think of the imperfection of the formulation or structuring of the argument.

Guthrie, in the Summary attached to his translation, says that "it must be admitted that [Socrates] tries the sympathy and patience of a reader by apparently going about the business at inordinate length, sometimes merely playing with words, and sometimes being allowed to get away with what are to us elementary fallacies" (p.33). The reader whose sympathy and patience are thus tried betrays the corruption we have been subjected to by the modern conception of philosophy. For us today, a philosophical argument advances a definite thesis, which it defends by cogent proofs. This never was the purpose of Plato in his writings. A dialogue of Plato aims not at establishing a thesis, but at provoking thought, discovering ambiguities, clearing confusions, exploring implications. Even the fallacies and the quibbling, whether acknowledged or passed by in silence, are part of the plan to irritate, to perplex, to sting and spur. If you read a dialogue of Plato in perfect equanimity, you are missing its point.

IV

Socrates makes a new approach (351b3-e7). But we should note that, in the dialogues, when Socrates seems to drop a line of argument and launches on another, he is not abandoning the earlier argument. He is constructing a mosaic of perspectives which produces a total vision. For, as I have repeatedly insisted, Plato's intention is never to demonstrate or prove a proposition or thesis but to offer a vision and inspire an insight. So when Protagoras shows that the earlier argument was logically defective, Socrates accepts that without demur, for he had not meant it to be strictly demonstrative, but simply suggestive.

Some people live well, others badly. To pass one's life pleasantly is to have lived well? Protagoras introduces a proviso: if the pleasures are fine. But are there pleasures that, as pleasures, are bad, and pains that, as pains, are good? Let us consider.

Socrates moves on to yet another lookout (352b-c7), and we sense that he is preparing the battleground for a decisive attack. Looking at knowledge, shall we adopt the common view and say that knowledge is powerless as a drive to action, swayed by passion, pleasure, pain, love, fear, or shall we affirm that knowledge is something fine and able to rule human action and that if a person knows what is good and what is bad nothing can overpower that person so that s/he does other than as knowledge directs, and that intelligence is sufficient for human wellbeing? Here if anywhere we have a tenet that Socrates will spare no effort to unfold and vindicate, and the language used shows clearly how firmly and passionately he holds it. How then does he proceed with the demonstration?

It is commonly said that many who know what is best will not act conformably but will do otherwise, overpowered by pleasure or pain or whatever. Let us examine this supposed experience of being overpowered by pleasure. Protagoras asks, Why should we bother about what the thoughtless many think? Socrates expects that our examination will prove relevant to the question of virtue we have been considering. And indeed, after making a careful analysis at great length of the experience of our supposedly acting against our better knowledge, at the close of the discussion he puts that analysis to use to vindicate his claim that courage – which Protagoras saw as the one virtue most independent of knowledge – is inseparable of wisdom (352d4-353b6).

What shall we say then of what people call being overpowered by pleasure (*akrasia*)? It is said that often, tempted by the pleasures of food or drink or sex, we do things while knowing that the things we do are harmful. They are harmful not as giving pleasure at the time but as leading to illness or penury or the like later on. If they did not have such ill effects, no one would call those pleasures bad. In bringing about those ill effects they bring pain. They are bad for no other reason than that they bring about pain or deprive of pleasure. Conversely, the pains said to be good are not good in so far as they are painful but because they lead to health, welfare, and the like — things which give pleasure. We seek pleasure as good and shun pain as bad (353c1-354e2).

Socrates goes on to show at length that if we identify pleasure with good and pain with evil, then we can see clearly that in all we do we aim at pleasure and try to avoid pain. If we could have a secure science or instrument for weighing pleasures and pains, taking into account proximity and distance, duration, quantity, intensity, and all other relevant factors, we would always be doing what ensures for us a surplus of pleasure (354e-357b4).

Among Socrates' audience, it was a common assumption that the end of all human action is pleasure. If we understand 'pleasure' as 'satisfaction' in a broad sense, this can be regarded as unobjectionable. Even at the highest and purest moral level, we seek satisfaction. For Socrates a pleasant life could not be other than a good life, even if that demanded the sacrifice or the renunciation of all pleasure as commonly understood. The Cynics and the Stoics were not mistaken when they thought of themselves as following in the footsteps of Socrates. But Socrates was not an ascetic: pleasure, even sensual pleasure, if it precludes no other good, is good. And for the purposes of the argument at hand, it was not necessary to go deep into the question of what we mean by pleasure.

This is what is usually referred to as Socrates' hedonism. Here I will only say that in the present context Socrates is examining what determines choice, and he finds that choice involves judgement as to what is good. The judgement can go wrong, and when it goes wrong, it goes wrong because of ignorance of all that is involved in the choice. So even on the level of action relating to bodily pleasures and pains, we make wrong choices not because we are swayed by desires and the like, but because we miscalculate or fail to calculate and weigh all the pleasures and pains involved. It may be objected that in the case of a person acting in passion the question of calculation does not arise. Socrates nowhere in the dialogues deals with this question explicitly.

My view is that Socrates is only interested in our behaviour as rational human beings. When we act as subhumans, Socrates' analyses do not apply to us, but then such action would not be proper subject-matter for philosophy but for psychotherapy.

The equation of good with pleasure in the *Protagoras* is merely a simplification for the purpose of investigating the identification of virtue and knowledge. It is a test-tube specimen for experimenting on. Let us say that the good is pleasure (because to try to agree what the good really is at this point is not feasible): we can then see that pleasure (our experimental token for the good) is inseparable of knowledge.

Those who conclude from this part of the *Protagoras* that Socrates advocated a hedonistic philosophy make the mistake of transforming a postulate adopted for a specific purpose into an absolute credo. In fact they illustrate remarkably the danger Plato saw in our seeking to derive knowledge from a fixed text. (Plato may have differed temperamentally from Socrates in his attitude to pleasure, but theoretically they were basically at one.)

The sensible view of pleasure as a natural goal for human beings has to be understood against the background of the strong condemnation of a life of mindless pleasure expressed in the *Gorgias*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the balanced assessment of the place of pleasure in a humanly good life in the second part of the *Philebus*. These are not separate views; they are complementary. All theoretical thinking fragments, and to take the fragment for the whole is the height of folly.

Having shown that on the assumption that we seek pleasure and shun pain, the right conduct of life would be a science and knowledge, Socrates says, What science and what knowledge that is, we will consider some other time (357b5-6). The question of the proper conduct of life could not be considered within the confines of the present inquiry as it would involve considering what makes human life worthwhile. This should suffice to let us see that to think that pleasure was for Socrates the end of life would be not merely simplistic but quite erroneous.

Socrates playfully asks Prodicus to allow him to forgo the strict distinction between pleasant, delightful, agreeable, and the like, for the present (358a). This is significant: Socrates is making room for a notion of pleasure that the common people would find at variance with – and often even opposed to – theirs.

Socrates continues: All actions aimed at a life free of pain and pleasant are fine, and being fine are good and beautiful (358b-360e). Here again I have to pause. Our analytic philosophers have a feast with

such a statement. Of course it is loose and wild. If our object is to reach water-tight inferences, such statements are trash: our academic philosophers have been demonstrating that over and over again, making quite a lucrative business out of it. But I reiterate: only lifeless abstractions can be ranged in correct logical form. Philosophical thinking develops ideas, unfolds meanings, creates ideal coherences. You can no more reduce a rich philosophical train of thought – 'argument', if you wish – to syllogistic reasoning than you can reduce a Beethoven symphony to a chain of inferentially valid propositions. Demonstration is the monopoly of mathematics, verification is the property of empirical science, meaningful coherence is the characteristic of creative thinking — of poetry, art, and philosophy.

If we identify the pleasant with the good, then no one knowing or believing some deed to be better than another would fail to do the better one if it is possible for her/him. To be overpowered by desire, fear, or the like, would be nothing but ignorance, and to be master of oneself would be wisdom. This is the gist of what is commonly referred to as the central Socratic paradox — the doctrine that no one commits wrongdoing knowingly or willingly. Socrates was no dreaming fool: he knew that people made bad choices. But the paradox ceases to be paradoxical when taken in the context of the whole of Socrates' philosophy of life: when we are in the truest and best sense human, we find our proper worth in a stance where moral and intellectual integrity are one. So long as we live and act on that plane of true humanity, we cannot choose to do wrong. But we are not always living on that plane, we are not always true humans, then we behave beneath ourselves, and then we are acting in oblivion of our true good. That does not belie Socrates' doctrine, for his intention was not to give an anthropological or psychological account of the behaviour of actual human beings, but to portray an ideal — an ideal we can try to live up to.

Fear is the expectation of evil. Then no one goes willingly to what one fears. Protagoras had asserted that courage is quite different from the other virtues, and especially from wisdom. What do the courageous seek? — the same thing as cowards? Protagoras denies that; they seek something different. Do the cowardly go to what is safe while the courageous go to what is fearful? People say that. Socrates insists that Protagoras speak for himself: Do the courageous go to what they see as fearful? But we have just agreed that this is impossible. They all go to what inspires confidence, both the cowardly and the courageous — both seek the same thing. Protagoras protests that what the cowardly go to is quite opposed to what the courageous go to, the ones go willingly to war, the others not. Is it fine to go or disgraceful? Fine. If fine, then

good — all fine deeds, we have agreed, are good. The cowardly refuse to go to war, which is fine and good, and hence pleasant. Is it knowingly that the cowardly refuse to elect what is fine and good and pleasant? If we assert this we would be overthrowing our earlier consensus. The courageous elect what is fairer and better and more pleasant. The courageous do not entertain shameful fear or shameful confidence. Their fear and their confidence are fine and good. But the cowardly and the reckless and the crazy entertain disgraceful fear and disgraceful confidence, through ignorance and folly. The cowardly are cowardly through ignorance of what is truly to be feared. Courage is opposed to cowardice, and comes through knowledge of what is truly to be feared. Then it is impossible that one can be ignorant and yet courageous.

We may note that courage as *hê tôn deinôn kai tharraleôn epistêmê* which was found unsatisfactory in *Laches* (194e) is re-introduced here without demur, where the point is not to stop at a satisfactory 'definition' of courage, but to link courage to knowledge and to all virtue.

In the *Phaedo* Socrates says that what is popularly known as courage is a strange thing because people who regard death as a great evil submit to it for fear of a greater evil. Also what is popularly known as temperance is a sham because the unwise control their lusts or endure pains in the hope of securing greater pleasures or avoiding greater pains. True virtue is not such a sickly trading of pleasures for pleasures, pains for pains, and fears for fears (68d-69e). When in the *Protagoras* therefore courage is made to consist in the overcoming of fear by a greater fear, and choice and deliberation in general are reduced to a calculus of pleasures and pains, we have to remember that these do not represent doctrinal elements of Socrates' or Plato's moral philosophy, but hypotheses introduced within a strategy intended to show that even on the popular understanding of these virtues, they are inseparable of conceptual evaluations and rest on knowledge.

V

The discussion between Socrates and Protagoras began with a question about the teachability of virtue, but there was no real opposition between Protagoras' confident affirmation and Socrates' assumed negation, because they had in mind two different things. For Socrates virtue meant the excellence proper to a human being; for Protagoras and the other Sophists, virtue meant the skill making for political success. In the course of the discussion Socrates affirmed and

developed his twin tenets — the unity of all virtue and the identity of virtue and intelligence. The single aim of all of Socrates' discourses is to lead his interlocutor to this insight. These are not theories or propositions to be demonstrated, but a vision to be communicated. The critical analyses of our academic philosophers are misdirected: if they do some good in affording students of philosophy some exercise in logical criticism, they do much harm in obliterating the true message, meaning and value of Plato's dialogues.

The *Protagoras* raises the question of the teachability of virtue and leaves it unresolved. That is as it should be. The problem has to remain an unresolved and unresolvable riddle if we are not to lose sight of the vital insight: virtue is *sophia* but it is not any particular *epistêmê*. Virtue is the *sophia* that knows its own ignorance and knows that the only safe course open to it is to hold fast to its internal integrity. In the *Republic* the highest wisdom is found in the mystic vision of the Form of the Good. In the *Statesman* the ideal ruler would not be bound by any law or constitution but follow his inner light. Jesus of Nazareth finds the sure guide to the good life not in the law but in love. Kant finds the highest moral principle in the autonomy of the good will. The insight (I shy away from the word 'truth' and the word 'intuition' has been spoilt by bad company) behind all this was translucently clear to Socrates, but we still find it difficult to grasp because it has been encrusted in layer upon layer of the errors of the learned.

PART TWO: THE PLATONIC VISION

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MEANING OF THE *PHAEDO*

Introductory

MOST SCHOLARS WOULD SAY that the *Phaedo* is about (1) the immortality of the soul, and (2) the 'existence' of the forms, or what is known as Plato's 'Theory of Ideas (Forms)'. I maintain that what the *Phaedo* is about is quite other than these.

A dialogue of Plato is not a theoretical dissertation; it does not set out to prove a thesis. A dialogue of Plato is what its author effectively says it is, a drama: even the arguments in a dialogue – however intricate and well-wrought – are members of the *dramatis personae* with set roles to play in the drama. The end is not a conclusion established argumentatively but a total impression created artistically, a vision.

So, in accordance with this view, when we come to study the *Phaedo*, instead of posing to ourselves the question, What does the *Phaedo* seek to prove?, we should ask, What vision does the *Phaedo* offer? The answer, to my mind, is: the *Phaedo* offers the vision of the philosophical life as the realization of the eternity of the soul.

From this point of view, the efforts of scholars to discover and expose faults and inconsistencies in Plato's arguments are misdirected. Not that we should not examine and criticize such arguments; Plato certainly wanted his readers to do that. I would even say that Plato often purposely planted the faults and inconsistencies to work his readers' minds. Yet whatever we may think of the arguments of the *Phaedo* or of the value of the theories advanced in the dialogue, its abiding significance, its most precious contribution to human culture, is to be found in the ideal and vision of the kind of life proper for a human being, the examined life which Socrates saw as alone a truly human life.

A. E. Taylor points out (*Plato*, 1926, p.177) that Plato himself refers to the *Phaedo* in Epistle XIII 363a as "the discourse of Socrates about the *psuchê*". Yet it is not a theoretical examination of the nature of the *psuchê* but – what was all that mattered for Socrates – an affirmation of the worth of the *psuchê* and of the conception of the good life as a life of caring for the *psuchê*.

Plato may have been – probably was – inclined to believe in the immortality of the soul; he may have found the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrines about the after-life alluring; but this does not, in my view, make of the examination of the question of the immortality of the soul the kernel and most valuable part of the *Phaedo*. I have no desire to deny that he may have had advocacy for the idea of personal survival as one of his aims in the *Phaedo*; (as a great artist Plato always weaved more than one theme and aimed at more than one end in every single dialogue); but I say that for us there is lasting value in the ideal and vision of the life of intelligence which the *Phaedo* taken as a whole impresses on us.

We cannot fail to observe how leisurely the tone of the whole dialogue is – both the narrative and the conversational parts –, with digressions, tarryings over circumstantial detail, humour. If the whole dialogue is a piece of philosophy; if the drama, the poetry and the philosophy are not separate elements in combination, but are an integral whole, then we should not look for the lasting value of the *Phaedo*, or of any of Plato's works, in any doctrine or any theory, proved or unproved, but in the overall message conveyed, the vision inspired, the creative ideas displayed. So in the *Phaedo*, saying farewell to the doctrine of immortality and the various arguments advanced in support of it, I find the lasting gifts of the *Phaedo* to philosophy and to humanity in: (1) The basic Socratic conception of the distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible. (2) The conception of the soul (mind) as the abode of the intelligible. (3) The ideal of the life of intelligence, the philosophical life. (4) The Socratic distinction between natural inquiry – producing relative factual knowledge – and philosophical inquiry giving understanding of self and of the ideas arising from the mind itself. This is a corollary of the principle of philosophical ignorance. As a bonus, we have the immortal portrait of a living incarnation of the ideal of the philosophical life.

The beauty and the eloquence of Plato's panegyric of the philosophical life must have captivated millions of readers throughout the centuries. I imagine it must have been the *Phaedo* more than anything else and more than any other work of Plato's that effected the transformation of Augustine of Hippo. But, although this beauty and

this eloquence are integral elements in the philosophical message of the work, I will not comment specifically on these aspects: they are there to nourish and to delight every soul in Plato's own inspired words.

Socrates' philosophy

The *Phaedo* relates the events of the last day of Socrates' life. That is the skeletal plot of the dialogue. But in essence it presents us with the portrait of a true philosopher: the nature and meaning of the philosophical life, of the life of intelligence, the main features of which we can already gather from the earlier dialogues. So, before commenting on the *Phaedo*, let me give a summary of Socrates' philosophical position.

Every student of philosophy knows that in the early dialogues of Plato we find Socrates busy with the examination of such ideas as reasonableness (*sôphrosunê*), courage (*andreia*), piety (*hosiotês*). In no case do we find him seeking to establish that there are such ideas. He takes them as his starting-point. He asks, What is reasonableness? And when his interlocutor gives him an instance or an inventory of instances, he says, That is not what I am asking for. He asks his interlocutor to look into his own mind (*psuchê*). In the *Euthyphro* he does not seek to convince Euthyphro that there is an idea of *to hosion*; he asks him to look into his mind and say what he takes *to hosion* to be. And when Euthyphro points to actual instances of *to hosion*, Socrates says, That's not what I am asking for: I want you to look into your mind and tell me what the character of the idea in your mind is. The conception is new to his interlocutors (all of them) and hard to grasp, but it is self-evident to Socrates. It is the conception of the intelligible as distinct from the actual, particular instances that can be numbered and observed and that have objective existence. This conception is Socrates' greatest gift to human culture and has become so ingrained in the modern mind that we have become blind to its reality. This is not a theory but a creative conception, and it is so ill-understood that even so-called Platonists exert themselves to establish the 'objectivity' of ideas, thereby effacing the Socratic distinction between objects and intelligible realities.

The whole meaning of Socrates' life, the gist of his life-mission, can be summed up in these words: We are only human inasmuch as we live in the realm formed by the ideas and ideals that are born in the mind. Hence these ideas and ideals constitute our worth and our proper perfection. When we try to grasp these ideas, we find them merging

into each other, and in the end find they have no meaning apart from the intelligence that brings them into being. Our worth and our reality are identical with this very activity of examining our ideas, our ideals, our minds – in one word, the activity of examining ourselves.

The mind and the ideas engendered by the mind were for Socrates all the reality we know. They are what gives us our worth and what constitutes our proper being as humans. This is the end-result of the Socratic elenchus as we find it in the early dialogues of Plato.

Let me butcher another sacred cow. In those early dialogues Socrates does not ask for or seek definitions. He does not ask his interlocutors to define, but to look directly at the idea, to remove all that obstructs their vision, to behold the idea in its naked purity, so as to be able to affirm that it is by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. This is the whole purpose and end of the elenchus: to realize that we find reality nowhere but in intelligence and the ideas created by intelligence.

The scene

In the opening scene of the *Phaedo* we find Socrates just relieved of his chains and the pleasant sense of relief gives him occasion to muse on the intricate interconnections between the sensations of pleasure and pain. His active mind cannot be imprisoned by 'the business at hand'; he speculates that had Aesop thought of it he would have invented a fable about the bond between pleasure and pain. This reminds Cebes to ask him about the versification of some of Aesop's fables and the proem to Apollo in which Socrates engaged since his imprisonment. He did this, he says, to satisfy certain promptings he had been having in dreams 'to make music'.

Cebes in putting forward his question said he had been asked that question by Evenus and wanted to know what answer he should give him. Socrates playfully says, "Tell him that and bid him farewell from me and tell him, if he is wise, to follow me as quickly as possible" (61b). This light-hearted jest opens up the question of the proper attitude to death.

Cebes and Simmias challenge Socrates to defend himself against the charge of being unjust and unreasonable in so willingly accepting death, abandoning his friends and fleeing a life that he himself says is under the governance of wise and good gods. When Crito presented the same challenge in the dialogue named after him, Socrates based his answer on what is right and what is not right to do. Here, taking his cue

from the terms of the 'accusation' and from the situation, Socrates suggests that a true philosopher makes of his whole life an exercise in dying and being dead, *ouden allo autoi epitêdeuousin ê apothnêiskein te kai tethnanai* (64a). In unfolding and developing this line of defence, two threads of thought are intertwined – the conception of the philosophical life as a life of dying to the body and the idea of the continued life of the soul in the hereafter.

According to my interpretation these two threads are separable. The conception of the philosophical life is genuinely Socratic and is of permanent and paramount value to humanity. It receives little surface display in the *Phaedo*, but it constitutes the undercurrent and the significant core of the dialogue. The idea of personal survival and the after-life looms large and accounts for the bulk of the argumentation. Whether this was the personal belief of Socrates or of Plato or of both of them is a question that can be debated. Whether the arguments prove this position is a question that must be answered in the negative. All of this is, in my view, of little philosophical significance. What is of the highest philosophical significance is that we find in the exposition of this doctrine an apt poetic expression of the eternity and divinity of the spiritual aspect of our being, of that in us which thrives by good deeds and withers by evil deeds, which we may for short call our soul. We don't have to take the Allegory of the Cave for a factual report to embrace its message.

The philosopher does not spend her/his life preparing for the moment of death or for what follows death as some ascetics do, but s/he *lives* the separation, practises the life of being superior to and master of her/his bodily needs, drives, desires, and vicissitudes. This is not the same thing as to live in the thought of death. To say that the aim of philosophy, or one aim of philosophy, "is to prepare for death" would represent a sickly attitude. Socrates says in the *Phaedo* that to pursue philosophy is to practise dying to the body, to live in the realm of pure ideas (the intelligible, spiritual, realm), so that [consequential not purposive] when death comes at last, which is the final freeing of the mind from the body, the philosopher finds nothing dreadful in it. This is quite different from preparation for death being an aim of philosophy.

I will develop this idea when we come to deal with what has been termed 'the affinity argument'.

Reminiscence and palingenesis

It is now generally agreed that Plato's dialogues may be classified chronologically into three main groups, early, middle, and late. There is wide agreement about which dialogues belong to which group; but, with a few exceptions, the order within the groups is anybody's guess. I suggest that the *Meno* belongs to the beginning of the middle period. A. E. Taylor has suggested that the abrupt opening of the *Meno* may indicate "that its composition belongs to the very earliest years of Plato's literary activity" (*Plato*, 1926, p.130). But the abruptness may be part of the drama, portraying the impetuosity of young Meno. What is new in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, is the concern with the status of the forms, the doctrine of reminiscence and the hypothetical method.

I think it is plausible to suppose that at the time of writing the *Meno* Plato had recently been intrigued by the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine of palingenesis, which opened the way to the reminiscence interpretation of the Socratic conception of ideas coming from within the mind, and suggested the 'theory' (hazy at best) of the independent being of the forms, together with the method of inquiry by hypotheses, as an attempt to theoretize and systematize the Socratic procedure and its basic principles. In the *Protagoras* (which may have been written not long before the *Meno*) the forms are still protean Socratic ideas, slipping into each other and melding with each other. In the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, it seems, Plato was experimenting, trying to theorize the forms and give them fixity. In the *Meno* he found them a provenance. In the hypothesis passage of the *Phaedo* (101b-102a) he was giving them a methodology, and in the theory of the cohabitation and separation of forms (102d-105b) he was giving them a logic.

In the *Meno* the doctrine of anamnesis is introduced by 'Socrates' to meet the difficulty raised by Meno about the possibility of learning. So 'Socrates' offers something he heard, coming down from 'priests and priestesses' and also from Pindar and other poets (81a-b). But behind the colourful tale we can easily discern the basic Socratic tenet that learning unfolds out of the mind.

When Meno insists on going back to the problem of the teachability of virtue, Socrates says that having regard to our ignorance of what virtue is, we can only examine the question of the teachability of virtue *ex hypothesēōs*. This leads to the exposition of the method of inquiry by hypotheses. 'Socrates' again draws on geometry for exemplifying what he means. To my mind, Plato, under the lure of mathematics, tries to make room for knowledge in despite of the Socratic principle of

ignorance, just as in the late period of his work, sensitive to the need for empirical knowledge for practical purposes, he introduces the method of collection and division.

Sticks and stones

The *Phaedo* has been regarded as the *locus classicus* of Plato's 'Theory of Forms'. Yet what 'Theory of Forms' do we find in the *Phaedo*? The non-committal and frankly tentative approach to the question of participation? The myth of reminiscence? – The hard core is the Socratic conception of the intelligible – *to noêton* – and of the active, creative intelligence – *nous*, *phronêsis* – as the one realm where we have communion with reality and where we ourselves share in reality.

In the space of less than a full Stephanus page (65b-66a), we have the gist of the Socratic distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible – we have the concept of the intelligible which I consider as the basic principle of true philosophy and which is the foundation of Platonism. I will merely give here a bare outline: Sight and hearing do not render truth to human beings. The reports of sight and hearing – and these are the best of the senses – fail us both on the count of accuracy and on that of clarity. Where, then, does the soul (mind) come into contact with reality (*tês alêtheias haptetai*)? When it tries to examine anything through the body it is led into error. It is then in reasoning that it approaches what is real (*ti tôn ontôn*). It reasons best when it gives up dependence on the body and reaches out for true being. The philosopher's soul (mind) therefore shuns the body and seeks to be in itself. Now, we say there is such a thing as justice, and beauty, and goodness. But we never perceived any such thing with our senses. That goes for all such concepts as magnitude, health, strength — the reality of anything that is. We do not get at the reality of these through the body. It is when we examine these in thought that we come closest to knowing them.

The reality of the forms does not need any proof and is not amenable to proof. The famous (now, thanks to our scholars, rather infamous) sticks and stones argument is not there to prove the reality of the forms, but to establish and clarify the distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible. The perceptible is necessarily relative and contingent, ideas are not: even the idea of the relative is not relative; even the idea of the contingent is not contingent. And the idea is not produced by the thing. Human beings must have seen and

handled equal sticks and stones for aeons before a genius cried out in the exultation – the birth-pang – of creativity, “Ah! These two are equal!” Just as the idea of 'two' itself does not come from the twos in the world. As Socrates says further on in the *Phaedo*, “You would loudly affirm that you do not know how else a thing becomes (what it is) than by participation in the proper reality of whatever it participates in, *metaschon tês idias ousias hekastou hou an metaschêi*, and that in such cases you do not have any other cause of the becoming of 'two' but participation in twoness, and that it is necessary for that which is to become two to participate in this, and for that which is to become one to participate in oneness” (101b-c). Perhaps our mathematicians, if not our professional philosophers, have already come around to this view. The form of two, the form of three, the form of four are creative patterns, thanks to which the things in the world acquire, for us, new characteristics and whole new systems of relations. [On this crucial point see further below the section headed “The Autobiography”.]

Even though it is true that all the content of knowledge comes to us through the body, yet that content cannot give us true understanding. All understanding, even of empirical facts and phenomenal happenings, comes from the patterns (ideas and theories) which the mind engenders.

“The *ousia* of whose being we give account in discourse”: whose reality we consider, examine, study, *autê hê ousia hês logon didomen tou einai kai erôtôntes kai apokrinomenoi* (78d). I think there is no question of proof here, because we start with the reality of the *ousia*. Here we have an oracular declaration, charting the intelligible realm which is one with the realm of reality. Plato does not give any proof or argument in support of this basic article of faith. He takes it, rightly, as self-evident, as all ideas – creations of the mind – are self-evident. He says *hês logon didomen*, but the *logon* given is not external to the *ousia*: in our philosophical dialectic, *erôtôntes kai apokrinomenoi*, we give creative development of the *ousia*, of *auto to ison*, *auto to kalon*, *auto hekaston ho estin*, *to on*. Only dead abstractions call for proof and are amenable to proof. Genuine philosophy creatively brings forth myths that breathe life into the shadows of the phenomenal world.

“You want us then to lay down two kinds of being, the one visible, the other invisible?” *thômen oun boulei ... duo eidê tôn ontôn, to men horaton, to de aides*; (79a.) The key-word here is *thômen*, we are clearly inventing. The visible we find all around us in the world; the invisible we do not ‘find’ anywhere, we bring it to birth in our mind.

When Socrates says that our knowing turns out to be nothing but remembering, *hoti hêmin hê mathêsis ouk allo ti ê anamnêsis tunchanei ousa* (72e), I maintain that this essentially gives expression to the basic

Socratic insight that all understanding stems from within us. Whether he did or did not tie it to the dogma of palingenesis neither adds to nor subtracts from its radical philosophical significance. Yet I tend to believe that it was Plato who gave the doctrine of anamnesis its Orphic/Pythagorean incarnation, for ideas too can dwell in different bodies. Socrates may not even be responsible for the reminiscence metaphor – which we first find in the *Meno* – but may have simply said that true knowledge (understanding) comes from within the mind. That is why I maintain that the *maieusis* image is more true to the original Socratic stand.

The 'doctrine' of reminiscence will not provide a factual answer to any problem in psychology or in the philosophy of language. To attempt to make it do any such thing would be to labour in vain. Philosophically, the myth of reminiscence puts us face to face with the reality and the mystery of our mind. The specialized disciplines of philosophy of mind and philosophy of language will continue to produce good theories, useful theories, but none of them will have a better claim to having solved the problem than Plato's theory of reincarnation. In the end they have to acknowledge that our mind is simply there and is the only reality we know.

The idea of innate knowledge will continue to be mystifying unless we accept the idea of creative intelligence as the very foundation of our being. We can understand and have knowledge because we creatively form ideas that confer intelligibility on things.

In 73c-77a Plato needlessly obscures the question of reminiscence by connecting it with recollection by association. He does this because he wants to emphasize the distinction between the ideas that arise in the mind and the things that give occasion to the rise of those ideas. And it is for that reason that he lays so much stress on the relativity, mutability, and inherent imperfection of the perceptible. Socrates did not need any proof for the distinction. For him the intelligible is simply what the mind engenders, even where it relates to perceptible things: the idea of length is not extracted from any particular length; there are in the world long things and short things (in a manner of speaking) but no length; length is only in the mind, created by the mind. So in a way we may say that Aristotle's abstraction was a return to the original Socratic conception and was a correction of Plato's hypostatizing of the forms. But then we may also say that Aristotle's correction was an over-correction in that it obscured the fundamental Socratic conception of the intelligible as the realm of reality. Plato's preservation of and emphasis on this conception was his greatest contribution to philosophy

and earns him forgiveness for all the excesses he permitted himself to this end.

When we say that the body does not give us certain knowledge and that only the mind working with pure ideas can give us true knowledge, we should be on our guard. Apart from the ambiguity of the word knowledge, it is misleading to say that reason gives us certainty, for the word 'certainty' is also fraught with ambiguity. I prefer to say that reason gives us the intelligibility we crave, but I also maintain – as I believe Plato did – that there can be no finality in human thought.

The passage in 100b is crucial and much depends on its interpretation, so let me quote it in full (keeping slavishly close to the original, even if this produces insipid English). "What I am saying is this, nothing new, but what I have always both earlier and in the present discussion never ceased to say. I will try to show you the kind of cause I fashioned for myself, *tês aitias to eidos ho pepragmateumai*, going back to what I have so often been dinning and taking my start from that, laying down there is a beautiful in itself and a good and a large and all other such, *hupothemenos einai ti kalon auto kath' hautou kai agathon kai mega kai talla panta*, which if you grant me and agree such things be, *ha ei moi didôs te kai sunchôreis einai tauta*, I hope from these causes to show and discover that the soul is deathless, *hôs athanaton hê psuchê*." To speak of 'existence' here is to invite confusion and raise endless problems.

The problem of the nature of the relation which the *Phaedo* variously refers to as presence or participation or communion is one that, I believe, arose with Plato as he wrestled with the implications of the doctrine of reminiscence and with the logical puzzles bred by the ambiguity of the verb *einai*. It was a problem which he sought to resolve but for which he never advanced or claimed or pretended to advance a final solution.

All right. Let us say with our learned professors that Plato believed that the forms are independent of the mind and that things in the phenomenal world are copies of the forms. Plato certainly uses language that suggests both those positions. But if all of this makes no sense to us – and I think no philosopher living today would subscribe to either of these views – what is the point of munching bad theories and indefensible doctrines over and over again in our learned tomes and academic journals? Where our interest is purely historical then it may be proper to try to envision as clearly as possible what Plato might have thought, though we must confess that we can never be certain of that. But as a philosopher I am only interested in such an interpretation or development of these views that gives me access to reality, a vision of

reality, a hold on reality – choose the metaphor to your liking. I offer in this book views I derive from Plato which I am prepared to hold and to defend. To call them Plato's views or Khashaba's views is of little import. I offer them because I believe them to be intrinsically valuable, not valuable for being ascribed to this or that person.

I would not say that the forms are realities *of* which we think, but that they are realities we think. If we regard the forms as 'objective' realities (a phrase which makes me dizzy, which I find utterly incomprehensible), then we are faced with the questions, What are they? Where do we find them? — questions which Plato may have mooted for a time. To me the forms are modifications (in Spinoza's sense) of intelligence.

I know that I will be accused of mixing my own thought with Plato's. It is a charge I do not care to reject. As I have repeatedly said, in writing on Plato or any other philosopher, my purpose is not primarily exegetic but philosophical. My intention is not to state what Plato thought (something of which no one can be certain) but to state what Plato makes me think, what thought Plato breeds in me.

Nicholas P. White, taking the 'sticks and stones argument' as an attempt to prove that equality is distinct from any perceptible equal things on the basis of two premises, finds fault with the proof. ("Plato's metaphysical epistemology", *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, Cambridge, CUP, 1992, pp.280-285.) I go beyond White. Not only Plato's argument here but any such argument can be shown to be flawed. When Socrates affirmed the distinction between the things in the actual world and the ideas that arise in the mind, he did not prove or seek to prove anything. He was creating for us the conception of the intelligible realm. And in the 'sticks and stones' argument of the *Phaedo*, Plato was not proving but displaying the distinction. This shows what I find so wrong with modern trends in philosophy. Our professional philosophers take it for granted that philosophy is concerned with proof and demonstration, whereas I maintain that philosophy is first and foremost concerned with the creation of ideas. Plato, as our professors have amply shown, has never succeeded in proving anything; not a single position of his has withstood their assaults. But Plato has given us a whole world of thought, thanks to which we can live a meaningful life. Plato has given us what humankind most needs today, a religion without dogma, a spirituality that does not fetter the mind. Christianity has borrowed much of value from Plato; if it had only absorbed the most important lesson he had to teach us and confessed its beautiful myths to be

nothing but myths, humanity would have been in a much better state today.

Eternity of the soul

The *Phaedo* contains four arguments for the immortality of the soul. For the reasons I have already given, I will pass over the first two arguments – the cyclical argument and the argument from reminiscence – in silence, and will also disregard the fourth, which is commonly regarded as the principal argument. However, the third argument (78b-84b), referred to as the argument from affinity, is in a class by itself. It is even farther removed from being a logical argument than the cyclical argument. It is more openly poetical and emotional. Even though it is ostensibly put to the service of the doctrine of personal immortality, at its core is not the idea of temporal continuity but that of supra-temporal eternity. We not only miss the point but also squander the inestimable value of the whole of what is called ‘the argument from affinity’ if we regard it as an argument for, an attempted proof of, immortality. This incomparable passage of the *Phaedo* presents us with the ideal of the philosophical life, the life of reason — it is nothing short of a prophecy proclaiming the oncoming of rational humanity.

When Socrates has presented the first two arguments and linked them, effectively making them into one complex argument, he concludes: If beauty and goodness and all such realities have being, and if we discover these within ourselves, then our soul must have been prior to our birth. Though Plato here has turned the logical or essential priority of the soul into a temporal priority, yet beneath this we have the radical bonding of the reality of the forms and the reality of the soul (mind), *kai ei mê tauta, oude tade* (76e). Socrates identifies the soul with the intelligible realm, or more particularly, with the seat or principle of intelligence. Plato may have decked this basic Socratic conception with borrowings from Orphism and Pythagoreanism but the core remains unchanged.

Simmias finds this quite satisfactory, for nothing is so clear to him as the reality of the beautiful and the good and all such realities (77a). Yet both he and Cebes still have some lurking doubts and ask for further assurance that our soul will not perish upon death.

Socrates proceeds: Let us consider what kind of thing is liable to suffer dismemberment and be scattered and what not, and then consider to which of these kinds the soul is akin (78b). What is compounded may be broken down into its elements, but what is not compounded is

not likely to suffer this fate. Inversely, what is constant and changeless is likely to be simple, while what is subject to change is more likely to be compounded (78c). Let me just observe in passing that we are here building a world of pure ideas.

We go on: the intelligible world of pure ideas – the realities of whose being we give account in our discussions, the equal and the beautiful and all that has true being – that intelligible world is always constant and uniform (78c-d). But the multiple particular instances in which these ideas are exemplified, are always subject to change and variation. So let us lay down two kinds of being, the visible (= perceptible) and the invisible (= imperceptible), *thômen oun ... duo eidê tôn ontôn, to men horaton, to de aides* (79a). The body clearly belongs to the class of the perceptible and the soul to that of the imperceptible.

When the mind (*psuchê*) makes use of the body in considering anything, it is dragged by the body into the changeable and is then led into error and is confused and dizzied and is drunken (79c). Here we have a re-affirmation of the Socratic position, that the understanding sought by the philosopher is not to be found in any investigation of the phenomenal world, which position is more clearly stated in the 'autobiography' section of the *Phaedo* (see below) and is given its crowning expression in the image of the divided line in the *Republic*.

In 79d we have a winged passage, which I allow myself to disfigure in this clumsy literal rendering in order to keep as close as possible to the wording of the original:

When the soul (mind) all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure, always is, deathless, and constant, and being of a like nature to that, remains with that always, whenever it is possible for it to be by itself, and then it rests from wandering, and in the company of that, is constant, being in communion with such; and it is this state that is called *phronêsis*

Through the mystical language and imagery here we can clearly see that for Plato, as for Socrates, the forms and the soul are primarily the region of the intelligible or more specifically the plane of intelligent being.

There is nothing in this to necessitate, imply, or suggest the separation of *psuchê* and *sôma*. As I see it, to say that mind and body exist separately is to make them into homologous members of the same realm and thus negate the distinctive character of the intelligible. The mind as the abode of the intelligible, is the one area where we have communion with reality and where we ourselves have reality. This is the essence of Platonism. Without the concept of the intelligible and of creative intelligence as the fount and ground of the intelligible,

philosophy (with its two wings of ontology and morality) is reduced to two options: on the one hand, dogmatic belief in a supernatural source of enlightenment and, on the other hand, stark materialism (physicalism, naturalism, phenomenism, positivism, – it will take a myriad names; no matter, it's matter!). Plato never loses sight of or faith in this Socratic insight, but he decks it in various garb.

Socrates did not really have to ask, *poterôi ... tôi eidei ... psuchê homoioteron einai*; (To which of these two kinds is the soul more akin? 79d-e), because he had actually brought both the concept of the intelligible realm and that of the soul into being by the same creative act.

This is what I call a creative idea. I also call it a myth: it is not a fact, nor does it correspond to or represent a fact. It creates an intelligible reality that gives meaning to the givennesses of experience. At this point I have to explain once more my view of the nature of philosophical thinking, and perhaps this is as good a context as could be for exemplifying that view. I maintain that all philosophical thinking is mythical since it has no relation to what is factual but only to what is real, where reality is identified with meaningfulness. So here in the *Phaedo*, all of the arguments for immortality can be viewed on two planes: an outer shell, couched in factual language, the literal truth of which the author himself may or may not believe in, and an inner formation of concepts, which have as much reality as they have meaningfulness. We have less difficulty grasping this in the case of poetry. What makes it difficult for us to grasp it in the case of philosophy is the inveterate idea that philosophy is in the same business as science and must deliver the same goods as science, which I consider a very damaging idea. This view of philosophical thinking is one which I have been at pains to present in *Let Us Philosophize*, and in several essays including "Philosophy as Prophecy" and throughout this book. I content myself here with saying that it is consistently with this view that I do not concern myself with the validity or otherwise of the arguments for immortality but only with the concepts which give us an ideal world, a universe of discourse in which our mind can move and live.

The ideal of the philosophical mind is "to collect and gather itself within itself, and trust to nothing other than itself, when it itself by itself considers what is in itself", *autên de eis hautên sullegesthai kai hathroizesthai parakeleuomenê, pisteuein de mêdeni allôi all' ê autên hautêi, hoti an noêsêi autê kath' hautên auto kath' hauto tôn ontôn* (83a-b). This is the gist of what Socrates explains in the 'autobiography', and it makes of all the speculations of the *Phaedo*

mere play. "When it considers other in other through other, it does not regard that as anything real", *hoti d' an di' allôn skopêi en allois on allo, mêden hêgeisthai alêthes* (83b).

Harmony

When Socrates had presented his argument for the survival of the soul on the basis of its affinity to the divine, Simmias objected that one could, on the same basis, argue for the survival of harmony when the lyre and the chords through which the harmony found expression were no longer (85e-86d). But Simmias damaged a good argument by unnecessarily narrowing it. If he had simply insisted that the affinity argument is as inconclusive when applied to the soul as it would be if applied to musical harmony his position would have been valid. But instead of resting his objection on the insufficiency of the affinity argument as such, he chose to base it on the specific assumption of the soul being a harmony. Socrates was thus given the easier task of showing that the theory of the soul as a harmony of body elements is objectionable, and was spared the more fundamental task of dealing with the insufficiency of his affinity argument.

The theory of the soul as an attunement or harmony of the body has the weakness of all theory and of all metaphor. It can be taken to pieces. But it is as good an idea as any that is meant to create a node of intelligibility. I might speak of the soul as the wholeness of the person. Aristotle very aptly spoke of the soul as the form of the body.

What does Socrates' refutation of Simmias' harmony theory amount to? — that the metaphor is not a good metaphor, it does not hold in every detail. No such argument, no argument whatever, can militate against the value of a philosophical idea, frankly presented as a myth, a creatively intelligible idea giving us a vision, a perspective on reality. Such are all of Plato's creative ideas, and they will survive all refutations. And the objection that the harmony theory is incompatible with the doctrine of knowledge as reminiscence becomes pointless once we take seriously Socrates' renouncement of all objective (factual) knowledge.

Of the two objections advanced by Simmias and Cebes to the arguments for immortality, Simmias' harmony argument (85e-86d) is the one that does not confound the ideal distinction of soul and body with the separability of soul and body. Cebes' analogy of the weaver and his cloaks, on the other hand, emphasizes the duality.

The autobiography

The 'autobiography' is the heart of the *Phaedo*, and its position (placement) in the dialogue is significant. Socrates says, "The whole question of the cause of generation and corruption will have to be examined", *holôs gar dei peri geneseôs kai phthoras tèn aitian diaprimateusasthai*. Then he adds, "I'm going to relate to you my own experience about these", *egô oun soi dieimi peri autôn ... ta ge ema pathê* (95e-96a). But when he relates his own experience, it turns out that that experience led him to renounce all search for physical, phenomenal causes and convinced him that all the truth we can reach – as far as philosophical questions are concerned – and all the truth we need is to be found within our own minds, in the reality of the ideas we find (no matter how) in our minds.

By Zeus, so far am I from thinking that I know the cause of such things, that I will not even admit that when somebody puts one beside one, that either the one to which the addition was made has become two, or that the one added and that to which it was added, by the placing of the one beside the other have become two, for I find it strange that when each of them was separate from the other, each was one and they were not then two, but when they approached each other, this was the cause for them to become two, the togetherness of being placed beside each other. Neither if somebody splits one, can I yet be convinced that this again – the splitting – has been the cause of the becoming of the two, this being the opposite of what was then the cause of becoming two, for then it was the bringing them together and placing each beside each, now it is the taking away and separating each from each. Nor do I yet admit to myself that I know the cause of the becoming of one, nor, in short, do I know of anything else through what it becomes or perishes or is, according to this method of inquiry, but I concoct for myself my own method, for that other I will in no way approach. (96e-97b.)

I have quoted this important passage at length because I believe that its significance has not yet been sufficiently absorbed in our philosophical thinking. Ideas are not found in things, they do not have any existence in the phenomenal world. Two sticks lying side by side are just a stick and a stick. It is only when a creative mind breeds the idea of the series of numbers and the ideas of the members of the series that the stick and stick become two. Socrates was not talking foolishly

when he said that it is by the idea two that the two become a two. This is the ground of Kant's assertion that the judgement $5+7=12$ is a synthetic a priori proposition. It is not empirical: if we have learnt our Hume, we should know that all the instances of five and seven we may encounter throughout human history will not assure us that the next five and seven we will come across will amount to twelve. It is not analytical: there is nothing in five or in seven or in five and seven out of which we can squeeze out twelve. Of course we can break up twelve into five and seven, but that is only because we would be working within the already established series of numbers. It is synthetic a priori, or, as I prefer to put it, a creative idea, and I reiterate that among modern philosophers it was Kant who most clearly grasped this basic Socratic insight.

At 97b Socrates says that he can no longer hold that he knows the cause of anything coming into being or perishing or continuing to be. Is this not a clear disclaimer of all the ostensible arguments in the *Phaedo*? Taken at face value – and the 'autobiography' together with the narrative scenes are the parts of the *Phaedo* that we should take at face value – it tells us plainly that all the speculation earlier in the dialogue about the cyclical character of genesis and about reminiscence and the like, all that was mere play. The pith is the idea of the soul as the most real – or, if you don't find the idea of degrees of reality palatable, as the only real – thing we know and the thing of highest worth, the soul as the principle of intelligence, the fount and support of the intelligible realm. I will advance as a plausible hypothesis – for which I will not fight – that that was the position of the historical Socrates, and that Plato to the end of his life was torn between two drives: the will to affirm and to vindicate the Socratic insight on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the desire to find room for mathematics and demonstrative reasoning and scientific (objective) knowledge for which Plato had such a weak spot. I think this hypothesis would explain much of the wavering and inconsistency that we find in Plato's approach to the problem of knowledge.

The programme that Socrates outlines as what he had expected to find in Anaxagoras's book (97d-98b) does not, in my opinion, represent what Socrates was actually looking for. It may have been an outline of what Plato dreamed to achieve some time in the future. C. J. Rowe commenting on this passage in his edition of the *Phaedo* (1993) says, "P[laton] himself fulfils something like the programme outlined here in *Tim[aeus]*." I think that whatever Plato may have thought or may have tried to do later in his life, in this passage he was portraying genuine Socratic irony, daring any human intelligence to try to give such an

account, for that is the kind of wisdom that is, on Socrates' view, out of bounds for humanity. The method Socrates adopted was not a scientific method meant to give us knowledge about the world, but was the method suited to give us the only wisdom available to human beings: understanding of ourselves. The complete identification of 'knowledge' with 'science' in the modern mind makes it difficult for us to understand what I take to be the Socratic position. We think that if philosophy is any good it must give us scientific knowledge; if not scientific knowledge of the first order, we are prepared to do with a poorer quality, provided it is of the same kind as the patent article. We are not ready to realize that philosophy gives something completely different and much more valuable: neither the useful empirical knowledge supplied by science, nor the comfortable blind faith traded by religion, but understanding of the ideas we ourselves create, and in creating which we create the only world in which we have our proper being as humans.

I have given my interpretation of the seminal passage in 98c-100e, where Socrates presents the idea of the forms as *aitiai*, more than once before, yet I will not apologize for repeating it here because I think it is of crucial importance, not only for understanding the thought of Socrates and Plato, but also for understanding the true nature of philosophical thinking. Briefly, Socrates affirms that no physical investigation, no objective facts, can give us understanding of the essence of anything or provide answers to any genuinely philosophical questions. The ideas arising in the mind have intrinsic intelligibility and it is they that render the facts intelligible. Socrates is sitting quietly in his prison awaiting execution when he could easily have escaped. No amount of information about the state of his body, not even a complete picture of the neuronal happenings taking place in his brain, can make us understand his behaviour. Only his ideas of what is honourable and just and good can make his behaviour intelligible. And these ideas themselves are not reducible to any other thing, not even to other ideas. That is the reason behind and the meaning of Socrates' insistence on the principle that it is by (the idea of) beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful.

Whatever science may tell us about colour or sound or taste, it can neither explain nor explain away the subjective reality of my sensations. However the sensation may be produced, the experience of vision is a reality on the subjective plane of being, and the colour itself is ineradicably there as a feature of the total situation. In the same way, whatever biology or anthropology or experimental psychology may tell us about the feelings of sympathy, love, etc., such objective sciences

can neither negate nor explain the subjective reality of our motives, feelings, attitudes, and ideals. These can only be explained by the ideas that are bred 'in' and by the mind.

Ian Mueller says, "The problem Socrates confronts is the explanation of things in our world, why they come to be, cease to be, and are." ("Mathematical method and philosophical truth", *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, Cambridge, CUP, 1992, p.182.) But, to my mind, this is precisely the kind of inquiry Socrates renounces. He is not concerned with the things in our world as such, but with what they mean for us.

Natural science is concerned with what exists, what is out there in the world. Philosophy is concerned, not with what exists, but with what is real, with meaning or what has meaning in the mind, what can only be in the mind and has its whole being in the mind. Scientists may tell us that they do not deny that there are ideas — so what's all the fuss about? The trouble is that scientists, seeing that ideas do not have objective existence, are concerned with them solely as working tools and accord them little reality. Platonists would say that it is precisely because ideas do not have objective existence that they are real and valuable for us; they constitute the realm in which we have our proper being as human beings.

In raising the question of the causes of coming into being and passing out of being (95e) Socrates does not seek to show the 'inadequacy' of the mechanical explanation of natural processes, as if that explanation could be supplemented and made adequate by the addition of an 'aetiological' explanation — as if taking Aristotle's four causes in combination could give us the adequate explanation we seek; he means to affirm that physical explanation and philosophical explanation belong to two unrelated worlds and produce two distinct kinds of 'knowledge' — a position re-affirmed and given its classic expression in the 'divided line' of the *Republic*.

Hypothesis

Although the core of the 'autobiography' is genuinely Socratic, Plato has, I believe, mixed with it some of his own experience and some account of early philosophy, and then appended to it his own method of inquiry by hypotheses. What I am concerned with in the first place is what I take to be the genuinely Socratic core. When Socrates says, "I thought I should take refuge in *logoi* and seek there the truth of things", *edoxe dê moi chrênai eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein*

tôn ontôn tên alêtheian (99e), I believe we are on genuinely Socratic ground, but when we read further: "Putting forward in each case a *logon* which I judge to be strongest, what appears to me to harmonize with this I lay down as being true", *hupothemenos hekastote logon hon an krinô errômenestaton einai, ha men an moi dokêi toutôi sumphônein tithêmi hôs alêthê onta* (100a), I believe we are moving onto a Platonic development of the Socratic approach. This is further developed in 101b-102a, which is essential for understanding Plato's dialectic (in one of the various senses which Plato gives the term 'dialectic'). I do not see this as a method of proof or as a heuristic method, but as a process of clarification, of attaining harmony and coherence in our thought.

Plato blends the hypothetical method with the conception of the forms as principles of understanding as if they were integrally united. He felt they were so united because for him the method of inquiry by hypotheses grew out of the Socratic elenchus. Although I feel that the systematic version of the method was a Platonic development, the linkage is justifiable in that the Platonic method, like the Socratic elenchus out of which it grew, is essentially a survey of pure ideas and the interplay of pure ideas. The dialectic advocated in the *Republic* is also essentially this.

We may say that Plato developed the Socratic examination of concepts into the examination of propositions. In either case the aim is to seek understanding in and through pure ideas, and the vindication of the understanding thus sought is to be found not in agreement with or correspondence to any objective existents but simply in intelligibility, in being satisfactory to the mind. There is therefore no question of truth or falsity, but simply of coherence or incoherence.

We are further told, "If anyone challenges the hypothesis [the *logon* of the earlier passage] itself, you leave him alone and do not answer until you have examined its implications to see whether they harmonize with each other or not. When you have to give account of that, you give it in the same way, putting forward another hypothesis, whichever seems best of those higher up, until you reach something *hikanon*", *ei de tis autês tês hupotheseôs echoito, chairein eôiês an kai ouk apokrinaio heôs an ta ap' ekeinês hormêthenta skepsaio ei soi allêlois sumphônei ê diaphônei. epeidê dê ekeinês autês deoi se didonai logon, hôsautôs an didoîês, allên au hupothesein hupothemenos hêtis tôn anôthen beltistê phainoito, heôs epi ti hikanon elthois* (101d-e). This agrees with what the *Republic* tells us where it says, "Dialectic inquiry alone proceeds in this way, doing away with the hypotheses to rest firmly on the *archê* itself", *hê dialektikê methodos monê tautêi poreuetai, tas hupotheseis anairousa, ep' autên tên archên hina*

bebaiôsêtai (533c-d). But the *Republic* does not tell us anything more specific about dialectic nor about the *archê* it reaches, the Form of the Good, and I don't believe that Plato had an arcane 'Theory of the Good' that he taught esoterically in the Academy. (Aristotle who spent twenty years in the Academy does not have anything *saphes* to tell us about the 'theory', and I don't suppose he was bound by an oath of silence.) The method and the *archê* are just what they were for Socrates, the unceasing quest fuelled by the principle of philosophical ignorance and yielding the sole certainty, that *phronêsis* is our only proper good.

A *hypothesis* which is *hikanon* is one which all parties to a discussion are willing to accept. There is no question of absolute truth or definitive proof. That the parties to an inquiry accept a certain position as *hikanon*, 'sufficient', does not make it certain or a definitive truth. It remains a 'given' hypothesis that can and must be questioned.

Argumentation

It may be that the immortality of the soul provides the main theme of the *Phaedo*, but in the end that is not what gives it its lasting value as a contribution to the spiritual heritage of humanity. I would much rather see the dialogues read purely as works of imaginative literature than have them subjected to the spiritless dissections of over-clever academes. Admittedly, we lose much that is highly valuable if we choose to ignore the 'adventures of ideas' (to borrow Whitehead's winged phrase) in Plato's works. But I would have that rather than dissipate the inspiring mythology and dry up the founts of Plato's oracular gushings.

The argument for immortality begins by defining death as the separation and release of body from soul and of soul from body (64c). This assumes the conception of a human being as made up of two separable (not simply distinguishable) elements, *allo ti hêmôn to men sôma esti, to de psuchê*; (79b.) All four arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo* rest on this assumption and become untenable once it is questioned. So, apart from any imperfections or defects in the structure of the individual arguments, the arguments cannot claim any conclusiveness once this assumption is questioned. But it is not my intention in this essay to examine the arguments for immortality given in the *Phaedo* or to repeat the many criticisms that have been directed to arguments for which Plato never claimed any conclusiveness. The final word on the whole tissue of the arguments of the *Phaedo* is given by Simmias in 107a-b: "I can't help still having in my own mind some

disbelief about what has been said", *anagkazomai apistian eti echein par emautôi peri tôn eirêmenôn*, to which Socrates responds approvingly and adds, "also our first hypotheses, even if you find them acceptable, nevertheless need to be examined more closely", *kai tas ge hupotheseis tas prôtas, kai ei pistai humin eisin, homôs episkepteai saphesteron* (107b).

In the early dialogues – which, I suggest, may very properly be referred to as the Elenchus dialogues – Socrates demolishes all theses. Let us remember that those dialogues were Plato's — recorded, reported, fabricated, imagined, what you will: they were the work of Plato. So is it not reasonable to suppose that also in the middle and the late dialogues whenever Plato presents a thesis, even when the argument in support of it is left seemingly standing, his purpose is that his readers should question it and subject it to critical examination? That is, in my view, at least a possibility worth pondering.

If we recognize that Plato never claims that his arguments give unassailable proofs, then it is only decent, when we criticize those arguments, not to vaunt of revealing Plato's errors and fallacies, but to say simply that we are engaging in enjoyable and useful intellectual exercise which Plato probably intentionally provided for us.

Cebes and Simmias did not want persuasion about the value of the philosophical life. That was a faith they shared with the whole circle of Socrates' intimate friends. But Socrates in the *Phaedo* chose to rest his defence ostensibly on the assumption of the survival of the soul. Cebes and Simmias ask for assurance that this is tenable. Simmias asked only for *pistis* and Socrates proposes to consider whether immortality is *eikos*, yet our scholars put the arguments under their logical microscopes as if Plato had claimed his arguments were mathematical theorems.

In 70b-c, in the space of a few lines, we have *diamuthologômen*, *hêntina doxan echeis*, and *diaskopeisthai* as practically interchangeable. This, in my opinion, is not only another example of Plato's well-known terminological fluidity, but has a deeper significance: in philosophical thinking reasoning, mythologizing, and having a point of view are closely related.

Students of Plato, who have no alternative but to rely on Plato's written texts, should, right at the beginning, heed Plato's warning against reliance on written texts. (*Protagoras*, 347c-348a, *Phaedrus*, 274b-278e, Epistle VII., 341b-345a.) We have no choice, but we should at least be aware of the danger. In my opinion, the lesson we need to keep in mind is this: no one has the right to say or can be justified in saying, This is what Plato thought or meant to say. All one can say is,

This is my understanding of Plato, this is the philosophy I have formed for myself while pondering the works of Plato. Within this general understanding we will of course continue to speak of what Plato thought and meant: no one should be hanged for that, but when scholars start tearing each other's throats over what Plato thought or meant, they should be reminded that they are forgetting the first lesson we should learn from Plato.

Simmias elects to give up the doctrine of the soul as harmony rather than the doctrine of anamnesis. The former, he says, we have received without proof, but only on the basis of likelihood and propriety. Such arguments are impostors, and if one is not on one's guard with them, they deceive. (But doesn't this apply to all the arguments in the *Phaedo*?) The doctrine of learning as reminiscence, he says, has been presented through a hypothesis worthy of acceptance (92c-d). Plato does not claim for the anamnesis *logos* more than that. Rowe comments: "quite why the hypothesis in question (the existence of the forms, d8-9) is 'worthy of acceptance' Simmias does not say." (*Phaedo*, 1993, p.219). The reason, I think, is simple: its foundation, the Socratic conception of the intelligible as *the* real, *hê ousia echousa tèn epônumian tèn tou ho estin*, is, for Plato, as it was for Socrates, the *sine qua non* of philosophical thinking.

Rationality

In 81c where we are told that the soul which has been too much attached to the body, is permeated, *dieilêmenên*, by the body, which the soul's constant association with the corporeal made to be grafted into it, *enepoiêse sumphuton*, I believe Plato would never have us take *enepoiêse sumphuton* in a literal sense. It goes against his whole metaphysics. This once again shows how we should always take Plato's language with a liberal measure of poetic freedom. The modern craze for correctness is sure death for philosophy in exactly the same way as it would be sure death for poetry. Teachers of philosophy will cringe at my words: what if their students start writing loosely in the name of freedom? It has to be impressed on them that they are only entitled to freedom where they have shown themselves sensitive to the finest nuances of thought, just as in the moral sphere it is only a person of the highest integrity who can dispense with rules and follow the inner voice: only a Shakespeare may go against the rules of prosody in three or four successive lines.

Simmias and Cebes are not satisfied with Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul on the basis of the affinity of the soul to the divine. Each of them has his own objection to the argument. Introducing his argument, Simmias expresses the opinion that to have adequate knowledge of this in our present life is impossible or at any rate very hard. However, not to examine these questions as diligently as possible is cowardly. We should seek either to learn or to discover how matters stand, or, if that is impossible, to take the best available theory – that which may be hardest to refute –, and with that, as a kind of raft, dare sail through the currents of life, unless we have a more secure vessel in the form of some divine guidance (85b-d). I have outlined Simmias' speech at some length because it seems to me to give expression to an attitude which has Plato's sympathy. In my opinion, it goes beyond Socrates' resigned equanimity in the *Apology* and runs directly counter to the radical renunciation of 'natural' knowledge so clearly affirmed in the 'autobiography' section of the *Phaedo* itself. I would say that even the method of inquiry by hypotheses appended to the 'autobiography' is a Platonic appendage and is not a true representation of the Socratic dialectic.

The atmosphere of dejection and loss of heart depicted following the objections of Simmias and Cebes and Socrates' cautioning against misology are an integral part of the total picture. If Plato had thought there were room for certainty in philosophical thinking, this episode would have been of little value. Against the background of the admitted inconclusiveness of all the arguments advanced, the warning against misology highlights the question as to the possibility and utility of rationalism. If we are convinced that reason cannot yield incontestable truth, then we are naturally disposed to ask, What use is it to follow reason? The answer of Socrates and of Plato is that our worth as human beings resides in the exercise of reason, and if all truths proposed by human beings are necessarily half-truths, we are not therefore obliged to rest in these half-truths: our intellectual integrity and our human dignity demand that we always see our half-truths for what they are. Faced with the insufficiency of discursive thinking, Plato opts neither for the imbecility of Pascal nor for the despair of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein. If we cannot have definitive truths, let us clothe our insights in myths, provided that we be always prepared to shatter our own myths.

Following the presentation of Simmias' and Cebes' objections, Plato inserts another interlude where *Phaedo* reports that all those present were dismayed. "That we had been so firmly persuaded by the preceding argument and then to seem again to be in perplexity and to

fall into such disbelief, not only in respect of the reasoning just offered, but also in respect of any future reasoning, for fear that we may not be equipped to judge or that the thing itself may not be accessible" (88c). □ I believe that is just what the historical Socrates would have affirmed, *ta pragmata auta apista*. Was Plato pulling our leg, testing our ability to discover the inconsistency? Did he want us to grasp that all the arguments that preceded and that followed were pure mythologizing? Or was he attempting the impossible, unable to resign himself to the Socratic renunciation of objective knowledge? Whatever the factual answer to these questions may be, the lesson we should draw is the lesson re-discovered by Kant, that pure reason will never give us answers to these questions. For, among modern philosophers, it was perhaps only Kant who had a firm grasp on the Socratic principle of ignorance. The myths we weave around these questions are valuable in that they embody ideas that enrich our intelligible world, ideas through which we live on the spiritual plane, ideas through which we attain our reality as creative intelligence.

Echecrates (to whom *Phaedo* is relating the conversation) shows himself sharing the general dismay following these objections. He asks himself, What reasoning can we trust, when the argument which Socrates had presented, and which had seemed so convincing, has now fallen into distrust? (88c-d). I think this speech supports the view that it was Plato's intention to lead his readers to awareness of the inconclusiveness of all theoretical arguments however *sphodra pithanos* they may seem to be. Then comes Socrates' warning against misology (89b-90e) to tell us that our awareness of the necessary insufficiency of all theoretical reasoning should not lead us to despair of rationality, *hōs ouk estin ... hoti an tis meizon toutou kakon pathoi ē logous misēsas*, "for there is no greater evil one can suffer than this, to hate reasoning" (89d). To be rational is to know that our worth as human beings depends on our exercising reason while simultaneously acknowledging that the determinate deliverances of reason are necessarily always deficient.

Plato had fully absorbed the Socratic principle of ignorance and knew fully well that there was no finality in philosophical thinking. He also knew that we cannot stop examining our ideas, erecting systems of thought, then pulling them apart. As thinking beings we cannot escape the necessity of living in worlds of our own making, but to preserve the integrity of our intelligence we have constantly to discover and reveal the flimsiness of our creations. The elenchus of Socrates and the mythologizing of Plato are realizations of the same insight.

When I speak of Plato's mythologizing, I am not referring solely or even primarily to his well-known myths, such as the one with which Socrates concludes the discussion in the *Phaedo*. All original philosophical concepts and theories are myths in being pure creations of the mind that (a) are not factual but have their reality in their intelligibility, and (b) can claim no finality.

Plato's rationalism is an affirmation of the Socratic position that true knowledge and understanding are only to be found in the intelligible realm, and Plato's 'irrationalism' follows from the lesson of the Socratic elenchus, that no theoretical formulation can be perfect.

Rationality, subjectively, is the boundless exercise of speculative reason. Objectively, we can equate rationality with the intelligibility and consistence of the *sumbainonta* of – what follows from – our basic hypotheses or first principles.

Conclusion

When at 107c Socrates says, "if the soul is immortal, then we should take care of it, not on account of this span of time only which we call life, but on account of all time", I think we would be gravely misjudging Socrates to give the conditional here more weight than is necessary. Further on in the same context Socrates says, "For if death were release from all, it would be a windfall for the evil." Neither Socrates nor Plato would say that in that case we should eat and drink and be merry. Socrates had all his life been teaching that the tendance of the soul, the life of intelligence, is what constitutes our worth as human beings, regardless of any reward or punishment or any other consideration. And this is precisely why at the present juncture in human civilization we stand in such urgent and vital need for Plato, because current modes of thought make it seem that we are constrained to a choice between dogmatism and a version of materialism. We are prone to think that there is no room for spirituality in a free-thinking culture. Spiritualism has become a dirty word and spirituality is at best suspect. Idealism has become narrowed to debatable metaphysical and epistemological theoretical positions. Official Christianity has monopolized and corrupted such seminal dicta as 'man liveth not by bread alone' and 'the Kingdom of God is within you.' We need religion without religions and none can give us that better than Plato.

Socrates concluded his defence: he had lived philosophically, tending his soul and caring little for the body. I feel that Socrates would have been content to say with Walter Savage Landor:

I warmed both hands before the fire of life;

It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

If I may be permitted the folly of trying to sum up the moral of a work of art in a few words, then no better words can be found than those with which Socrates concludes his final speech, which I give in Jowett's classic rendering:

Wherefore, I say, let a man be of good cheer about his soul, who having cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him and working harm rather than good, has sought after the pleasures of knowledge; and has arrayed the soul, not in some foreign attire, but in her own proper jewels, temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth – in these adorned she is ready to go her journey to the world below, when her hour comes (114d-115a).

CHAPTER SIX

KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY

FOR SOCRATES, ideas were all that mattered. They were what made human beings human and made human life worthwhile. He did not raise the question of their metaphysical status. For Plato, ideas were all that was real; they were all that was knowable: for, following the venerable Parmenides, he held that the intelligible and the real are one, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai* (fragment 5).

Hence, for Plato, knowledge and reality are two sides of a single coin, two dimensions of one thing. More often than not he uses the word *alêtheia* – usually translated ‘truth’ – to mean reality. As often he uses *phusis* to mean – not phenomenal nature, the things we see and touch – but the reality beyond that. For him *alêtheia*, *ousia*, *to on*, *phusis* are, to say the least, closely related. In this essay I concentrate on the development of this thought in the *Republic*. The essay is basically a running commentary on the central part, from the closing section of Book V to the end of Book VII. If I often go beyond the text of Plato, my defence is that my purpose is not exegetic; I do not mean to give an exposition of what Plato thought, but to enter into dialogue with Plato and develop my own position, which I regard as fundamentally Platonic.

This part of the *Republic* begins with the question: is the ideal society that Socrates has been describing earlier possible, and if so, in what way? (471c.) Socrates says that there is a single change which, if effected in our far from perfect existing societies, would take them along the way to perfection (473c). He affirms that unless philosophers assume rule or rulers become philosophical, there will be no cessation of the evils which plague human societies as we know them today (473c-e; this is reiterated in practically the same words in 499a-c, 501e, 540d).

This proposal is commonly referred to by commentators as a paradox. It is true that Plato makes Socrates refer to it as a *paradoxon*

logon, but that does not justify the sticking of that tag to it in serious comment. Have we yet found any other remedy? If we think it almost axiomatic that democracy is the best form of government, that is only because human beings, as they are at present, do not deserve anything better. Plato's judgement on democracy remains true: it is the system with least power for good and least power for evil.

If our proposal is to be shown reasonable, we have to clarify what we should understand by 'a philosopher' (474b-c). Plato here uses the word *diorisasthai*, usually translated 'define', but the 'definition' offered extends from this point in Book V to the end of Book VII and can hardly be seen to answer to any kind of formal definition.

A philosopher loves wisdom *sophia* and desires all knowledge *pantos mathêmatos* (475b-c). But an important distinction is introduced: not all curiosity is love of wisdom (475d). And the distinction rests on a fundamental principle and goes to the heart of the question of knowledge and reality. For true knowledge is not knowledge of particular instances but of the essence of things. For, as we learn from the *Phaedo*, all actual things, things in the outer world, the objective world, are necessarily imperfect and inconstant and cannot supply the true content of knowledge. As we learn from both the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, things can be the occasion of knowledge, but are never the source of knowledge.

So Socrates says that genuine philosophers are *tous tês alêtheias philotheamonas*, those that love to behold *alêtheia* — not truth, which always has an extraneous reference, but that which truly is, which has true being. We see at once that for Plato the question of knowledge and the question of reality cannot be parted, for, as we can learn from the earliest dialogues, intelligence is the one reality in which we can find rest.

At this point Socrates introduces the concept of forms. I think the manner of introducing the concept here – the beautiful being opposed to the ugly, these are two, hence each is one (475e-476a) – is a fancy of Plato the mathematician. This is not an argument, in the sense of proof for the reality or the existence of forms, and academic philosophers who labour to show the weakness of this and similar 'arguments' are ploughing the sand. The 'argument' serves its purpose fully by displaying the concept, offering it to us as a gift to enrich our minds, to give our minds new scope and a new dimension.

Those who busy themselves with the phenomenal do not enjoy insight into the reality of things (476b). Once again we find ourselves reminded of the lesson of the *Phaedo*: the farther we withdraw away from what is given in experience and dwell on what is bred in the mind,

the closer we are to the higher reaches of knowledge (intelligence, understanding, reason) and to communion with reality. Reality for Plato is a vision, a spiritual experience, a state of perfection we attain, not the product of a syllogistic process we perform, not the 'highest' (most shadowy and most vacuous) abstraction in a series of abstractions as with Aristotle who arrives in the end at an inane God endlessly chewing the cud of his bare existence, too lethargic to die of boredom. (In 476d Plato opposes *gnômê*, knowledge of the intelligible forms, to *doxa*, knowledge of the sensible things as in the *Meno* he opposes *epistêmê* to *doxa*; but Plato never sticks long to any fixed terminological usage.)

In 476e we have the question: *ho gignôskôn gignôskei ti ê ouden*; He who knows, does he know something or nothing? In six little words Plato shot out a bolt that has produced more thunder and fire than all the thunderbolts of Zeus. Plato wanted to affirm and to emphasize the reality of the intelligible. What follows in this central part of the *Republic* – the metaphysical core not only of the *Republic* but of the whole of Plato's work – shows that, for Plato, the intelligible is all that is real, and that that reality is radically distinct from all that is tangible and visible and objectively given. That Plato calls the real 'something' – as, in the early dialogues, justice is affirmed to be 'something that is' –, is a linguistic necessity. But those for whom nothing is but what can be seen or touched or otherwise handled, took 'is something' to mean 'is an existent in the extended universe', thereby negating the very essence of the real and giving rise to the controversies and the misunderstanding that have been raging from the day of Aristotle to the present day. Next Socrates asks: *poteron on ê ouk on*; which simply asks whether the intelligible is or is not and we are content to say that the intelligible is. But later on we will find that only the intelligible truly is and that the sensible cannot be truly said to be.

In his introductory note to this section, H. D. P. Lee writes, "In the latter part of this section the argument centres round the Greek word *einai* ('to be'), which can be used to denote existence, reality, or truth, with consequent ambiguities with which Plato's contemporaries and predecessors were much occupied" (*The Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee, 1955, Penguin Books, p.236). In the context of Plato's philosophy, this word should present no difficulty: *to on* for Plato always refers to the real which is one with the intelligible. Except for the common, non-technical, uses of the verb, which are inescapable, Plato never ascribes being without qualification to the multiple, mutable, perceptible things in the world, which are no more than images and shadows of true being. Again, except for the common

idiomatic use of *einai* to mean 'it is so', 'that's right', which is of no philosophical significance, Plato does not use the word to mean truth as conformity with an actual state of affairs. For Plato, *alêtheia* is not 'truth' as we commonly understand it, but genuine being, reality. Lee goes on to translate *poteron on ê ouk on*; thus: "Something existent or non-existent?", which pre-judges the whole issue of the 'existence' of forms.

Similarly, Cornford in commenting on this section says that the forms are "ideals or patterns, which have a real existence independent of our minds" (F. M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, 1941, p.180). In the first chapter of this book I maintain that even though Plato's language may often be strongly suggestive of such a view, the independent existence of the forms is not a necessary feature of a meaningful doctrine of forms fully in accord with Socrates' and Plato's basic conceptions and outlook. When we say that the forms 'exist apart from' the perceptible things, that is an affirmation simply of the distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible. To overcome the ensuing confusion I introduce in my *Let Us Philosophize* the opposition of existence to reality, which I regard as a radical and necessary distinction.

Glaucon retorts, *pôs gar an mê on ge ti gnôsthêie*;, how can what is not be known? (477a), and Plato means us here to take both *on* and *gnôsthêie* in a strong sense, as is evident from the following speech: *to men pantelôs on pantelôs gnôston, mê on de mêdamêi pantêi agnôston*, what wholly is is wholly knowable, what is not is in no way knowable. When in the *Theaetetus* we come to deal with a weaker variety of knowledge, knowledge of the sensible, we are faced with the same question: whatever we know in some sense must also in some sense be. But there we are moving on an altogether different plane of being; we are in the sphere of belief and opinion and deal with things that are half-way between being and not-being. The 'divided line' in Book VI articulates this principle and the Cave allegory in Book VII gives it graphic expression, but the gist is here: what wholly is is wholly knowable and only what wholly is is knowable in the fullest sense.

If a thing is such as to both be and not be, it stands in-between being and not-being. To being corresponds knowledge; to not-being corresponds ignorance; to what is in-between being and not-being there must correspond a condition between knowledge and ignorance (477a-b). Plato had already enunciated this position in the *Meno* where he designated the middle condition as *doxa*. All so-called knowledge of the particular and the sensible is not true knowledge, is not the knowledge that gives insight, but is belief and opinion, not because it is

uncertain, although it is that, but because it is 'knowledge' of a phantom world. Knowledge of the extraneously given can never shine with the inner light, the self-evidence of reality.

For Plato, knowledge is only to be accounted knowledge when it is infallible (477e). Why is that so? Plato says that it is the mark of knowledge that we can give an account of it. Here again I hear the voice of Plato the mathematician trying to rationalize a true insight. The truth is simpler and more deep-rooted: it is what Socrates knew well, that truth shines in its own light; that the creation of the mind is a reality in its own right; that it is by beauty that beautiful things are beautiful; that you cannot prove that a thing is beautiful, but can only see it as beautiful. Socrates could not prove that it is better to suffer wrong than to perpetrate wrong: he lived that truth, and in living that truth lived in reality.

Knowledge is infallible, not because it is demonstrable or provable in any way; not because it is the result of a valid inferential process, but because it is its own evidence. I do not want to use the word 'intuitive' because that word is loaded. I prefer to say that understanding is creative and engenders its own reality.

The concept of the world of becoming as the domain of belief and opinion Plato finds so important and so novel, that he goes to great length to drive it home, elaborating and qualifying over the space of two full Stephanus pages (477a-478e). The position that the existent world, the realm of the actual, hovers between being and not-being is incidentally given support by the consideration that there is no particular beauty that may not also appear ugly, no particular act of justice that may not also be unjust, no piety that may not have a share of impiety (479a). None of these particulars is any more than it is not what we say it is (479b). This, of course, Socrates had been showing all the time in his elenctic examinations. I say the position is given support here incidentally because the primary end of this passage is to affirm the distinction between the perceptible particular and the intelligible idea. We can say that the Socratic distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible develops, in the hands of Plato, into the distinction between *doxa* and *epistêmê*.

We therefore relegate the multiple, the mutable, the perceptible, to a position *metaxu ousias te kai tou mê einai*, between being and not-being (479c), and there they rest, till Plato returns to them in the *Theaetetus* when, late in life, he begins to have some theoretical interest in things of the world. When Plato concludes that, of all those who busy themselves with the actual particulars (the sanctified facts of empiricists) *doxazein phôsomen hapanta, gignôskein de hôn*

doxazousin ouden, "we may say that they opine but have no knowledge of what they opine about," he is re-affirming the position adopted by Socrates in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo*, where he says *edoxe dê moi chrênai eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tèn alêtheian*, "it occurred to me I should take refuge in reason and there seek the reality of things" (99e).

We set out to explain what we mean by a philosopher. We conclude that a philosopher is he who loves (seeks) the object of true knowledge, that is, reality (479e-480a).

In 486a, almost incidentally, Plato drops the fiery phrases *tou holou kai pantos aei eporexesthai*, the philosopher reaches out for the whole and the all, and again *theôria pantos men chronou, pasês de ousias*, beholding all time and all being — words which have given inspiration to all philosophers of an idealist temper ever since. For the only philosophically viable sense of reality is perfection. The problem which starts genuine philosophical thinking on its course is: How can the imperfect, the finite, the determinate, the particular, be? For only perfect being seems immediately intelligible. The equation of reality and perfection is the ground principle of Platonic metaphysics.

Then, like a flash of lightning, Plato dazzles us with a passage of no more than 76 inspired words (490a-b), which, to my mind, encapsulates the essence of all true metaphysics. I have more than once alluded to and commented on this passage in my writings. Here I will quote the passage in full but will not comment on it at this point, since the whole of the present essay is my comment on this passage:

Would we not be making a reasonable defence, when we say that a true lover of knowledge, being by nature drawn towards communion with reality (*to on*), will not rest in the multiple that appear to be (*epi tois doxazomenois einai pollois*), but goes on and does not slacken or peter out in his love, until he grasps the very essence of each reality (*auto ho estin hekastos tês phuseôs*) by that in his soul which it befits to grasp such — and it befits what is congenial —, approaching and uniting with (*plêusias kai migeis*) what has real being (*tôi ontî ontôs*), begetting intelligence and reality (*noun kai alêtheian*), has understanding and true life and nourishment (*gnoiê te kai alêthôs zôiê kai trephoito*) and thus is delivered of his labour, but not before then?

The passage is necessarily mystical in tone, for philosophical understanding in its highest reaches is essentially a mystic experience, being an immediate awareness of the perfection of being in the integrity of creative intelligence. It is necessary to lay stress here on two

essential points. It is (1) by becoming united with reality, and (2) by engendering reason and real essences, that a philosopher attains understanding. Philosophical understanding is at no point passive; it is through and through a creative act, and it is that creative act itself that is the reality that the philosopher comes to behold and to understand.

When in 498a Plato says that by the most difficult part of study he means *to peri tous logous*, what does he have in mind? The general sense of course is clear, and though translators here use a number of variants – 'dialectic' (Jowett and Lindsay), 'abstract discussions' (Cornford), 'abstract argument' (Lee) – the variations merely reflect the richness of the Greek *logos*, not any obscurity in the text. Still, we may legitimately ask, what are we to understand by this? On one plane, Plato must have had in mind the phenomenon of youths enthusiastically plunging into the fray of arguments raised by the great thinkers of the time and popularized by the Sophists. But why should that be the most hazardous part of learning? Because theoretical thinking, unaided and unchecked by reference to the empirical domain (as in the objective sciences and the arts), demands not only maturity of mind but also strength of character and high moral integrity if it is not to fall to the seductions of pretentious eristics, of which we have so much in our academic journals, or expedient axe-grinding, of which we have so much in our political assemblies and our media; for the acquirement of the technical skills of logical argument does not bring with it immunity to these ills.

A person whose thought is truly directed towards true being, beholds a realm of constant realities, where no injustice is incurred or suffered, where order and reason reign, and lives in harmony with and in the likeness of those realities (500b-c). Once again we see how, for Plato, philosophical understanding, reality, and the good life are inseparable. Again when he says *to phusei dikaion kai kalon kai sôphron*, what is in nature or by nature just and beautiful and reasonable (501b), we see how, as often, for Plato, *phusis* does not mean the phenomenal world, nature as commonly understood, but the world of supra-temporal reality or ideal reality.

Then when Plato enters on the question of the manner in which and the studies and practices by which the philosophical nature is to be readied for its great work, we have the most explicit treatment of the question how knowledge stands to reality and to goodness. The last ten pages or so of Book VI (502c-511e) therefore give us the gist of Plato's position on this crucial philosophical problem.

How can we reconcile Plato's assertion that the elements necessary for making a philosophical nature are rarely found together in one

person but are mostly found dispersed (503b) with Socrates' tenet that virtue is one whole? In the first place, I think that Plato's view of human nature differs widely from Socrates', just as the temperaments of the two men differed. In the second place, on this particular point I think a reconciliation is possible, since the elements Plato has in mind here are not all moral but include physical traits and natural endowments. But this is not the place for going into this problem in detail.

Socrates says we must test our would-be philosopher's capacity for the greatest of studies, and Adeimantus puts forward the explosive question, What do you mean by the greatest of studies? (503e-504a). (It is rather at this point that we get to the core of the metaphysical problem, so that we can say that the following eight Stephanus pages, 504a-511e, constitute the epitome of all metaphysical philosophy.)

At this point Plato chooses to allude to his theory of the tri-partite division of the *psuchê*. But the doctrine does not really play any part in dealing with the relation of knowledge and reality, though Plato mentions it here in passing; so this is not the proper place to consider that doctrine.

Is there, Adeimantus asks, a study greater than that of justice and the other virtues? (504d.) Socrates affirms simply, bluntly, blankly that the highest knowledge is the form of the Good, *hê tou agathou idea megiston mathêma*, (I purposely follow Plato's text in not saying 'is knowledge of' as translators commonly do, 'correcting' Plato's construction) and that we do not know this sufficiently. He also says we have been saying this all the time (504e-505a). Are these empty words? Is this not what Socrates in all his discourses had been leading up to? All virtue is one and is one with knowledge. And when we ask, What knowledge?, the answer is invariably, Knowledge of the good. And when we ask, But what is the good?, the only answer we get is that the good is knowledge. The good is what we arrive at when we follow unhampered reason to the seat of active, creative intelligence. Plato's words here are bland and vacuous if taken in separation, but are full of meaning when viewed as the apex of the dialectic quest for the meaning of true being, of goodness, and of intelligence as inseparable aspects of one whole, one reality. If this is reminiscent of the Trinity of Christian theology, it isn't that I am casting a Christian aspect on Plato's thought but rather that Christian theologians were intelligent enough to grasp the fecundity of this Platonic insight.

So we are told that those who say that the good is intelligence, *phronêsis*, cannot say what intelligence, but are obliged in the end to say that it is intelligence of the good (505b). In saying this Plato plainly

points to the Socratic quest, and Plato is consistent with the totality of his thought and outlook when he maintains that it is only in the living process of dialectic that we gain an insight into reality and glimpse the form of the Good.

Again we sense a touch of mysticism where Plato refers to the Good as that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all it does, divining its reality but not able to grasp adequately what it is (505d-e). Perhaps at this point I have to ward off a possible misunderstanding. I refer to mystic feeling and mystic language in speaking of Plato's approach to reality. The mysticism meant here is in full accord with rationalism. I think that every human being worth his salt experiences at one time or another a mystic feeling. It is the awareness of a reality that is immediate and in some way perfect. Its object can be very simple: a flower seen as if for the first time or a notion freshly grasped in its full significance. I had one of the most indelible experiences of my boyhood years when I was reading Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. As I came to the close of Part One of the book, I suddenly had a very vivid feeling of how all that had gone before in the story formed one integral whole. It was then that I grasped the notion of duration as a supra-temporal reality. The experience is inexpressible only in the sense that the immediacy of the feeling cannot be communicated; but it can be described and can be interpreted. The experience of religious mystics is of the same nature. What is wrong with the accounts given by religious mystics is that they couch their interpretations in terms of the religious traditions to which they belong. As far as it goes, that is inevitable and legitimate; all poets do it; but when the interpretations are used to lend credence to beliefs that should properly be regarded as myths, what was an illuminating ray of insight turns into shackles of superstition.

(When Plato makes Adeimantus go back once again to the question whether the good is knowledge or pleasure or something else (506b), we may guess that he is trying to put out of the way a debate that was going on in certain philosophical circles at the time. Indeed, the way the question was posed earlier in 505b-d reads like a sketch for a dialogue which Plato kept in reserve till he wrote the *Philebus* many years later.)

When Socrates is pressed by both Adeimantus and Glaucon to say what he thinks the good is, he demurs, saying that it is beyond him to say at the moment what he thinks the good is, but that he will tell them of an offspring of the good that is very much like it, *ekgonos te tou agathou ... kai homoiotatos ekeinôi* (506d-e). He could not do otherwise. True philosophy is not a body of knowledge but a way of

life, and the highest 'knowledge' attainable through that life is an illumination that can only be engendered in the pursuit itself. I will return to this point of the ineffability of the good later on in this essay when I deal with the problem of dialectic.

It is very significant that Plato finds it necessary at this point (507b-c), as a prelude to saying what he has to say about the highest reality within our reach, to recall the root conception of the distinction between the multiple actual instances of any character and the unique intelligible form of that character, which is, which has true being; the multiple being perceptible but not intelligible, while the forms are intelligible but not perceptible. This reminder was necessary and indispensable because the highest reality accessible to us, symbolized by the Sun as the child of the Good, is none other than the seat and fount of the intelligible realm, the mind as active, creative intelligence, giving birth to all forms in which and through which alone the things of the world have meaning.

So Socrates, finding it not possible to give an articulate account of what the Good is, introduces a simile. The Sun is the offspring and the like of the Good, standing, in the visible sphere, to sight and the visible, in the same relation as the Good stands, in the intelligible realm, to mind and the intelligible. As the eye sees clearly only by the light of day, but dimly by nocturnal lights, so the soul (mind), where reality and true being (*alêtheia te kai to on*) shine, understands and knows and is endowed with reason, but when it turns to the darkling region of becoming, the mutable and the perishing, it opines and wavers and is not certain (507c-508c). Here we already have the gist of 'the divided line' which, a little further on, is given in a more detailed but schematic form.

What gives reality to the things known and the power of knowing to the knower, is the form of the Good. Being the source of knowledge and of reality (*aitian d' epistêmês ousan kai alêtheias*), knowledge and reality both being beautiful, it is yet other than these and more beautiful. Just as light and sight are akin to the Sun but are not the Sun, so knowledge and reality (*epistêmên de kai alêtheian*) are akin to the Good but are not the Good, for the Good is far above these in excellence (508e-509a).

Once again the mystic fervour and the mystic language are evident and with good reason. For the form of the Good is the idea of perfection, the only viable metaphysical conception of Reality. To have a conception of reality on the metaphysical plane at all is to have a conception of what the most perfect being is. Before Plato and after Plato many thinkers offered their conceptions of ultimate reality, of the

most perfect being. But it was Plato who saw that, though we cannot know Reality objectively, our idea of Reality is the reality we live in and that confers reality on all the contents of our experience. That is why I think that we may rightly consider Plato as the father of metaphysics, but not the inane word-mongering and symbol-mongering to which some moderns have wrongfully appropriated the name 'metaphysics'.

(When Glaucon once again at this point asks whether that is to be identified with pleasure (509a), I think Plato intends that either as a comic relief or as a jibe at some contemporary school of thought.)

And as the Sun does not only give the things seen the capability of being seen, but is the source of their generation and growth and nourishment, so the Good does not only give knowers the power of knowing, but gives them their very being, while it is itself beyond and above being (509b). It is clear that we are concerned here with the ground and origin of all being. Why does Plato insist again and again that it is beyond and above all being and all truth and all knowledge? Because ultimate reality, perfect being, cannot be confined to or identified with any finite or determinate actuality. We will return to this crucial principle when we deal with the nature of dialectic. (This is a lesson further embodied in the *Parmenides*, a lesson that Plotinus grasped, but that not many others have paid attention to.)

After all that has been said so far, 'the divided line' will be seen as no more than a graphic illustration of what we could well have learned from the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*. And when Socrates in preparing the ground for presenting the divided line simile asks, "So now you have these two notions, the visible, the intelligible?" (*all' oun echeis tauta ditta eidê, horaton, noêton*; 509d), it should be obvious that the Line, the Cave, the Sun simile, and all that Plato says in this central part of the *Republic* that we are dealing with, is already implicit in the Socratic distinction of the sensible and the intelligible.

The gist of 'the divided line' (509d-511e) is that we have different levels of knowledge on two planes. Perhaps I do not depart much from Plato's view if I put it this way: on the plane of the phenomenal world, we can have images or illusions on the lower level, and we can have perceptions and opinions on the higher level. On the intelligible plane, employing forms, we can have scientific knowledge of perceptible things on the lower level, and we can have a purer form of knowledge concerned with first principles on the higher level. Plato uses for these levels, from the lowest to the highest, the terms

Eikosia concerned with images

pistis concerned with actual things, living and unliving

dianoia concerned with the concepts of things

nous, noësis concerned with pure ideas and principles

Translators are not agreed on what English word to use for each of these terms, nor is Plato himself always consistent in his use of these and other related terms. What is important to note is that the various levels of 'knowledge' correspond to and deal with various levels of being or reality. Thus it is only in the highest reaches of intelligence, when the mind deals solely with pure ideas, that it converses with reality in a genuine sense.

While (1) the objective sciences may be (i) empirically descriptive and inductive, based mainly on observation, experiment, statistics, and the like, or (ii) theoretically deductive, proceeding from assumptions and definitions, (2) philosophy can employ analogy and deduction marginally, but in its highest reaches, as dialectic, it can only be creative or, to use the term I used elsewhere, oracular. Plato had no use for (1, i), which can produce nothing but *doxa*. The fact that this is what we now commonly mean by science, and that this is what has given us what power we have over nature and is, together with (1, ii), the foundation of our technological achievements, makes it difficult for us to grasp the fundamental Socratic-Platonic insight, that all such knowledge, for all its practical – perhaps vital – utility, does not give understanding. This is an idea I have tried to put forward in *Let Us Philosophize* and elsewhere. But I will not permit myself to digress further at this point, especially as this essay is not on Plato's theory of knowledge, but on the relation of knowledge and reality in Plato's thought, especially in the *Republic*.

That the natural sciences must be relegated to the region of belief *doxa* is clearly implied in Socrates' renouncing of physical speculation as explained in the 'autobiographical' section of the *Phaedo* (95-102). To think that only later, in the *Timaeus*, did Plato include the natural sciences in this sub-section, as suggested by Lee in the introductory note to the Divided Line in his translation of the *Republic* (Penguin Books, 1955, p.274), is to betray a failure to enter into the spirit of the Socratic-Platonic outlook.

I will not comment on the Allegory of the Cave because it merely illustrates what has gone before. Plato aptly puts it after the theoretical exposition to reinforce and fix the salient points of the preceding discussion.

Plato was under no obligation to dovetail the detailed images and divisions of the Sun simile, the Divided Line illustration, and the Cave allegory into each other. All three are truthful figurative representations of one basic conception. None of them claims to be an exact replica of

anything or to offer a rounded theory; as Socrates puts it: *theos de pou oiden ei alêthês ousa tunchanei* (517b), only God knows whether the explanation he is about to give happens to be true. All the efforts of scholars to trace and discuss points of agreement and discrepancies between the three accounts are wasted labour that seeks to foist on Plato intentions he never had. You might as well expect of three photographic snapshots of the same individual taken from different angles to answer to one another in every detail.

In the sphere of knowledge, the form of the Good is last to be seen and hardest, but when seen reason shows that it is the source, *aitia*, of all that is right and beautiful, engendering in the visible sphere light and the lord of light, and in the intelligible sphere it, itself being lord, gives reality and intelligence, *alêtheian kai noun paraschomenê*, (517b-c). Here the merging of the epistemological and the metaphysical is complete. The form of the Good is the first principle of intelligibility and it is the perfection of being and we see that no being can be intelligible except as emanating from that source.

Again, the power of learning and the faculty of understanding all things is inherent in the mind, *psuchê*, and as if the eye were unable to see unless we turned the whole body towards the thing to be seen, we find that it is by directing the whole of the soul away from the sphere of becoming and towards true being, that we may behold the Good (518c-d). True knowledge is a journeying of the whole soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of reality and perfect being, which is the Good. And we must remember that in so doing we do not direct the soul to anything extraneous but to its own reality. The heavenly abode of the forms in the *Phaedrus* is poetry and mystic symbolism. The poetry and the symbolism are needed to represent the spiritual plane of being in which alone human beings attain the highest perfection accessible to them.

Education then is the art of directing the soul, not implanting into it light and sight from outside, but knowing that the light is in it, it only needs to be pointed in the right direction (518d). And just as that knowledge is not to be injected from outside into the mind but is to be found in the mind itself, so the reality we seek is nothing foreign to us but is the reality of the fount and spring of the intelligible realm, the principle of intelligence itself. And true education is that turning of the whole soul (mind) towards true being. Socrates had always taught that to know the good is to be good. For Socrates that remained an ethical principle. Now Plato teaches that to know the good is to be united with the good. The ethical principle is translated into a metaphysical principle.

In what follows Plato sketches the programme of education which seeks to turn the whole soul towards true being, the form of the Good. The guiding principle of the whole of Plato's programme of education is that learning is to be sought in and directed to that which always is, *aei ontos*, not that which becomes and perishes (527b). We have no need here to follow in detail Plato's programme of studies, but it is necessary to stop by its crowning piece, dialectic.

Cornford concludes his introductory note to the section dealing with the programme of education by saying, "When we have learnt to think about Bigness and Smallness themselves, and to ask what they are, we are dealing with intelligible objects and have left sensible things behind" (p.236). The wording here can be misleading and can confirm a very common misinterpretation of Plato's thought. Nobody has ever been able to think about Bigness itself, or Smallness, or Justice, or whatever, nor has Plato anywhere said anything about any of the forms. He says in the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and elsewhere, that in the highest reaches of thought, we reason with, by, through, the forms, but not about the forms. When we ask: What is, say, beauty in itself?, as Socrates had been doing all his life, we find ourselves obliged to admit that we cannot say anything about the forms, and that all we know is that it is by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful.

After outlining his programme of studies, going through arithmetic, geometry, plane and solid, astronomy and harmonics, Plato tells us that all of that was merely the prelude to the chief study; for those who have mastered these studies are not yet dialecticians (*ou gar pou dokousi ge soi hoi tauta deinoi dialektikoi einai* 531d). Those we may say are our professionals and specialized scientists, together with our media gurus and our politicians. What torrents of nonsense they let loose on us when they think they can pronounce on ultimate questions and questions of principle!

Cornford, commenting on the approach of the Pythagoreans and Plato to astronomy, says that "there was no question of physical forces causing the movements" (p.246). Do we know of any physical forces causing the movements of the heavenly bodies? Do we know of any physical causes at all? This is the kind of loose language that perpetuates the delusion that science gives us knowledge of causes, and makes it possible for prominent scientists to hold out the hope that some day physical research will enable us to understand why the big bang – or whatever it is that started the universe off – occurred, not realizing that all that scientific research or theorizing can ever produce is a description of a state of affairs preceding another state of affairs. All they can do is remember which shadows come first, which, later,

and which together, as the allegory of the Cave puts it (516c-d), and as Hume clearly saw.

If they are not able to give and receive reason (*dounai te kai apodexasthai logon*) they will not know anything of what we say they ought to know (531e). To 'give and to receive reason', that is dialectic: but these words which look deceptively simple are an ocean of unsounded depth and call for our closest attention.

When by dialectic, apart from all that is perceptible, through pure reason, we seek reality, *ho estin*, and persist till we grasp the Good, it is then that we attain the goal of intelligence (532a-b). Through this mystic haze, don't we discern the very features of the old Socratic aporia and philosophic ignorance, when the search for the good led to knowledge, and the search for knowledge led to the good, and the good and the knowledge turned out to be none other than our ceaseless quest for that one thing that was goodness and knowledge at once and that we find nowhere but in that restless intelligence which ever seeks that elusive reality?

The idea of the Good in us is the highest conception of Reality we have, and if only perfect being is intelligible – how could the imperfect sustain itself, bring itself or bring anything into being? – then we feel we cannot but conceive of ultimate Reality as being such as is our idea of the Good. We feel that only in the light of the principle that Reality must ultimately be intelligent and good, can the being of the world and our own being be intelligible.

Earlier when Socrates was asked to say what he thought the form of the Good was, he took refuge in simile. Now Glaucon asks for an account of the nature of dialectic, its various modes, and its methods (532d-e), and Socrates tells him that he (Glaucon) would not be able to follow, because what Socrates had to offer was not an image, *eikona*, but the very reality, *auto to alêthes*, as it appears to him, *ho ge dê moi phainetai*, and yet he would not affirm whether it is such or not, *ei d' ontôs ê mê, ouket' axion touto diischurizesthai* (533a). Is this wavering or hedging or blatant inconsistency? It may be partly this and partly that, but it is also something beyond and above all that. Socrates will not affirm whether it is such or not, but he will affirm that there is something to behold, *all' hoti men dê toiouton ti idein, ischuristeon* (533a). In the highest reaches of intelligence, reality cannot be constrained into a determinate formulation, but it can receive truthful expression in symbol and myth. We will return to this further on as it is of the utmost importance.

We have various grades of knowledge (let us give ourselves some rein with terminology here). We have empirical knowledge, wholly

concerned with perceptible things. And we have theoretical knowledge – mathematics and the sciences – which yet falls below the level of dialectic because it does not question its basic concepts and assumptions; does not transcend its first principles: it can and must from time to time criticize its ground-principles, but then it replaces those by others which – by the very nature of objective science – must be assumed without question, *mê dunamenai logon didonai autôn* (533b-c). Then we have dialectic – the method of philosophy – which alone proceeds by destroying its ground assumptions, *tas hupotheseis anairousa*, to reach a first, secure principle, *ep' autên tèn archên hina bebaiôsêtai* (533c-d). But can it ever claim to be in possession of such a principle? Does Plato give us such a principle in any articulate, definitive formulation? Has any philosopher ever produced such a formulation that was not immediately turned into shreds by other philosophers?

Cornford in a footnote (p.254) says, "The above passage seems to describe the special use of dialectical method to criticize and finally confirm the premisses of the mathematical sciences, thus 'doing away' with their hypothetical character." I cannot accept this watered-down interpretation. Dialectic fully destroys the hypotheses, showing them to be – however good they may be for their specific purposes – false inasmuch as they cannot fail to involve contradiction. No articulate statement can be free of contradiction. This is what the *Parmenides* is all about.

To give a rational account of one's statements is never fully accomplished until the grounds of the statements are demolished. Philosophy is thus a rhythmical process of mythologizing and critical demolition of the myths — that is the diastole and systole of the living mind; if we stop at the diastole we have theory fossilized into superstition; if we stop at the systole, we have a lifeless state of existence, vacant of all meaning and all value. A truly human life demands that we philosophize, and to philosophize is constantly to build up myths and constantly to demolish our myths.

When the philosopher attains to the vision of Reality, which the *Republic*, equally with the *Symposium*, describes as an ineffable vision, s/he can only express the reality s/he beholds in metaphor and myth. The metaphors and myths are valuable in that they give expression to the perfection of Reality. But they remain metaphors and myths. Wherein then lies the superiority of philosophy to the sciences? It should lie in this alone, that the philosopher, like the poet, acknowledges that her/his myths are myths. No determinate formulation is definitive: no articulate 'truth' is too holy to be shattered and brought to dust. The

value of philosophy resides in giving scope to the life of active, creative intelligence.

Plato says that he who is not able to distinguish the form of the Good from all else, and support it by reasoning, cannot be said to know the Good (534b-d). I confess that I cannot form a clear idea as to what Plato might have had in mind in saying this. Was he referring to some formal exercises practised in the Academy (assuming the Academy to have been established before the writing of the *Republic*)? We are told that Plato gave a formal theoretical lecture on the Good. If he had anything positive to say there, Aristotle presumably would have been in a position to know. But as far as I can see, Aristotle tells us nothing in this regard that we cannot find in the dialogues.

What Plato means by dialectic has been another subject of endless dispute among scholars. The reason is that it was not Plato's intention to say anything specific about dialectic, nor could he had he wanted to. For, for Plato, dialectic is simply the highest reach of philosophical thinking: to define dialectic is to define philosophy, and that is just what Plato had been doing or trying to do in this central part of the *Republic*, and indeed in the dialogues as a whole. We can with justice say that Plato's dialectic is one with Spinoza's understanding *sub specie aeternitatis*: if we ask for a definition of this, we can find none other than Spinoza's *Ethics* in its entirety.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ARGUMENT OF THE *REPUBLIC*

Prefatory Note

THIS ESSAY, which was originally conceived as an attempt to examine the argument of the *Republic* as exemplifying the true nature of philosophical argument, developed into something like a commentary on the whole of the *Republic*, advancing further, as I hope, the interpretation of Plato – or rather, I will permit myself to say, the version of Platonism – that I have been putting forward.

I maintain (1) that the *Republic* is not primarily about the best political constitution but about the best life for a human being; (2) that the *Republic* does not argue for a thesis or set of theses but oracularly proclaims a vision, this being the true function of all genuine philosophy.

In this essay and elsewhere – principally in *Let Us Philosophize* –, I use the term 'myth' in a special, extended sense. (See *Let Us Philosophize*, particularly Book One, ch. 8, and the section dealing with dialectic below.) To differentiate between this special usage and the common usage of the term especially in this essay where we are much concerned with both kinds, I use *muthos/muthoi* when referring to Plato's well-known myths as commonly understood and *myth/s/mythical* when intending my special usage.

Introduction: Argumentation in philosophy

The nature, limitations and role of argumentation in philosophy is a subject about which there is much confusion and many unquestioned assumptions, and all of this is doing grave harm to philosophical thinking. I offer a view of philosophical argument which I find

exemplified in the dialogues of Plato, above all in what may be regarded as the best-argued of Plato's works, namely the *Republic*.

At one time I was foolish enough to say that argument has no role to play in philosophy. (See "Philosophy as Prophecy" and the shorter version, "A Confessed Heresy".) I do not recant what I meant to affirm in saying that, but I know I was wrong in using the word argument in a very narrow sense, meaning logical demonstration. Argument is rarely that. We argue to convey a point of view, to clarify a thought, to bring out explicitly what is implicit in a certain standpoint. Philosophizing does involve various types of argument in this wider sense.

On the other hand, most professional philosophers would say that argument is the very lifeblood of philosophy. I would have no quarrel with that if 'argument' were taken in a sufficiently liberal sense, coextensive with the concept of rationality; but I think that most of those who hold this view have at least at the back of their minds the sense of proof and demonstration with a view to arriving at some final truth. It is argument in this stricter sense that I maintain has no more than a marginal and ancillary role in philosophy; I go so far as to say that proof and demonstration are foreign to genuinely philosophical thinking.

A related view (or a different way of expressing the same view) is that which regards philosophy as problem-solving. I would register a protest against that view too. To my mind, the creative part of philosophizing consists in formulating the problem. A philosophical problem creates a universe of discourse in which the mind may roam endlessly but which can never be congealed into a final solution. That is so because a philosophical problem does not relate to the world of objective existents where we can have true answers to factual questions. A philosophical problem relates to the world of meaning where we can only have myths which find their guarantee of reality in their intelligibility. (This is also true of all theoretical science but, consistently with my insistence on the radical distinction between philosophy and science, I prefer to give wide berth to all scientific discussion.)

In this essay I propose to examine the argument – or, in other words, the thought-pattern or thought-structure – of Plato's *Republic* to discover the true nature of genuinely philosophical argument (and, hopefully, to show that the enigmatic language of the preceding paragraph is not so enigmatic after all). I believe that if we carry out the same exercise on the most compact and most closely-argued of Aristotle's works or on any work of a modern philosopher we will arrive at the same results as in this study.

Perhaps I had better spell out at the start what I mean to arrive at. I maintain that a philosophy (yes, *a* philosophy; there can be any number of valid philosophies just as there can be any number of good poems or original works of art) is a creative endeavour that generates ideas, ideals and visions that give colour and meaning to the givennesses of experience. A philosopher does not look for intelligibility in an outer world but creates her/his intelligibility and reality. A work of philosophy is thus akin to a landscape painting or a mosaic formation that has aesthetic verity. I intend to show that the argument of the *Republic* is just such a creative mosaic and that – apart from the elenchus of Book I, which proves nothing – any logical proof or demonstration to be found in Plato's masterpiece relates to marginal or incidental details.

Professional philosophers are fond of the words 'proof' and 'definition' and are in the habit of using them very loosely. There would be no harm in that if we acknowledged that we were using the terms loosely. But combined with the prevalent assumption that the end of philosophy is to give us 'true knowledge', we tend to read more into these terms than is justifiable. That is why I shy away from these terms and seek to show that, taken strictly, proof and definition can have only a marginal and subsidiary part to play in philosophical thought.

Let me be clear about what I mean to deny when I say that deductive argument and proof have only an ancillary and marginal role to play in philosophy. In saying this I am contending principally against those Analytical philosophers who would turn philosophy into a branch of mathematics, with their notations and quantifiers and equations. But I also mean to correct a presupposition and an emphasis that almost all philosophers hitherto have explicitly or tacitly espoused without question — the assumption that the object of philosophy is to arrive at ascertainable truth.

If we follow any real-life discussion between two or more parties, in whatever sphere and on whatever level of intelligence or sophistication, we find very little direct refutation of the other party's position and very little logical demonstration of one's own position. What we find with each move in the discussion is an attempt to make one's position more coherent, more consistent, and accommodating of more and more of factors relevant to the subject of discussion. This also applies to philosophical discussion at its best. The object is to give a more comprehensive and profounder view — of what? Of nothing! For it is not a view of anything objective, but is a self-contained vision. And that is what we find in the *Republic* as in any good work of philosophy or of literature generally.

Plato refuses to submit to the despotism of words. Analytical philosophers who argue against Plato by dissecting his words, instead of imbibing his meaning by being open to the atmosphere and the main flow of what he says, wrong Plato and exclude themselves from the possibility of understanding him. By unjustifiably focusing on dead words and on questions that Plato did not raise or did not think out because they were not crucial to the task in hand, Analytical philosophers foist on Plato thoughts he never thought. Thus they fully vindicate Plato's distrust of writing since a book cannot defend itself. To understand a good book we have to approach it in good faith and with goodwill. Analytical philosophers approach a work of philosophy in the spirit of litigants determined to win a case.

I have no patience with the clever dissection of detailed arguments as if they were mathematical theorems. Arguments in a philosophical work do not build a logical structure. They illuminate concepts, clear away obscurities, add touches of colour, contribute features, all of which adds up to an aesthetically satisfying mental landscape. The steps in a philosophical argument can have more or less of coherence, relevance, cogency; but – unless they are mere bloodless formal schemata – can never form logically watertight inferential systems. So formal criticism of the details of a philosophical argument can be an interesting and useful intellectual exercise. But the value of the work as a whole is to be judged by the criteria of breadth and depth and beauty of the vision it presents. So here I do not examine the detailed steps of a particular argument except where those steps might affect the total picture; nor do I find it useful to comment in detail on scholarly criticism of particular arguments, since I reject in principle the notion that philosophical arguments are demonstrative.

Analytical philosophers have vitiated modern philosophical thinking. Not only does their insistence on inferential demonstration belie the true nature of philosophy, but also their presumption to dissect any part of a philosophical argument in isolation of the whole empties the profoundest work of philosophy of all value and all significance. The meaning of any proposition, of every single word, in a philosophical work, is determined in and by the whole, and can only be grasped when viewed in the whole.

Cleanse language of all ambiguity and all equivocation and you render it lifeless. It becomes a system of abstract symbols that can produce formally valid analytical inferences, but cannot produce, convey, or inspire original thought. Living language functions creatively; it brings forth new thought by exploring its shadowy regions; it inspires new thought by suggestion and evocation. It will

always be riddled with imperfections. That is a blessing. Its imperfections provoke continuous creative development in new, still imperfect, formulations. It is only thus that we continue to live as intelligent beings. Analytical philosophers want to turn us into perfect lifeless computers.

What the *Republic* is About

Any work of Plato's has more than one dimension and deals with many themes. It is common to regard the *Republic* as mainly a work of political philosophy, and no doubt there is much political thought in it, especially in its penetrating analysis and criticism of existing political constitutions in Books VIII and IX. But on that ground alone we could say, perhaps with more justice, that the *Republic* is mainly concerned with the philosophy of education. I prefer to say that the central and most important theme in the *Republic* is the nature of the good life, which is none other than the philosophical life.

The Socratic elenchus can be understood as revealing that nothing – no one single thing or concept – can be understood in separation. And so it should come as no surprise that, in the *Republic*, the quest for the meaning of justice is found to lead us to an examination of the whole of philosophy and the philosophical life and to a vision of the ultimate ground of all being, all knowledge, and all value. As Spinoza was to see, nothing can be truly understood except when seen *sub specie aeternitatis*.

When a poet starts a poem, he does not set himself a last line as a target to be reached. He starts with a certain impression or feeling or idea as a seed that yearns to germinate and unfold and develop. It is the same with all creative work. The *Republic* begins with the ideal of the good life symbolized by the venerable old Cephalus. The *Republic* then goes on to build up the picture of a good life and describe what it takes for that good life to be realized in human beings.

On my reading, where the description of the model city is principally what Plato explicitly says it is, namely, a large-scale illustration of what we are trying to see in the individual human being — on that reading, what would the overall plan of the *Republic* be? The elenctic Book I ends, as all the elenctic dialogues do, in aporia. It may or may not be that this Book was originally written as one of those early dialogues. In any case at this point Plato sets himself a new task. We cannot have a formal definition (on the mathematical model) of justice (*dikaioσύνη*, righteousness), but we can have by other means

insight into its meaning and will then necessarily see that it is the highest good for a human being, as Socrates had always taught.

This extended task Plato expounds dramatically through the challenges put to 'Socrates' by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II.

'Socrates' then suggests it might help us find what we are looking for if we construct a large-scale model, if we could look at justice in a city-state rather than in an individual. The first outline of the city is completed in Books III and IV. At the end of Book IV, making use of the analogy of the ideal city, Plato shows that justice in the individual is the right constitution of the soul, in the same way as it has been seen in the city to be the right constitution of the city. Then he develops the model further to show that the ideal city, if it is ever to be, would owe its excellence to the wisdom of its philosopher-ruler. By the time he has shown what he means by a philosopher (in 472a-541b, by no means a digression as many commentators hold, but the very heart of the project), we already have the highest good of the individual identified with the philosophical life, and that in turn identified with mystical communion with Reality (the form of the Good), where intelligence, virtue, and true being are one.

The analogy is then further developed in Books VIII and IX to drive home what should have been already translucently clear, namely, that the philosophical life – the life basking in the sun of the Good – is the happiest and best. Corollary: the more distant we are from that the more miserable we are.

Book X, as all commentators agree, is an appendix, its first part, for one reason or another, harking back to the quarrel with poetry, and its second part summing the moral of the whole in a *muthos*, as in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*. But to obviate misunderstanding, I have once more to spell out that I am not denying that Plato meant his political comment to be relevant to the contemporary Hellenic scene.

THE ARGUMENT OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC

Prelude: the quest for righteousness

The opening of the *Republic* (327a-331b), with its fine circumstantial detail, is not an external embellishment. It is an integral part of the aesthetic build-up. The peaceful and festive atmosphere of the occasion, and the urbane, friendly and cheerful tone of the initial conversation, lead to the portrait of the contented old Cephalus and his wise representation, in word and in deed, of the superiority of the

pleasures of the mind over those of the body. Cephalus stands witness to the good life, albeit in his case it lacks the depth that can only be given by philosophy, that can only be secured in the examined life.

There is no hint of disapproval of poetry when the old Cephalus quotes Pindar and adds, *eu oun legei thaumastôs hôs sphodra*, how exceedingly wonderful! (331a). As we should expect, Plato's censuring of poetry is directed in the first place to the content of the epic poetry which was 'holy scripture' for the common people.

At 331c Socrates introduces the formal theme of the *Republic* by asking whether justice may be taken simply to consist in truthfulness and rendering what one owes to another. We may note in passing that Cephalus had not actually given that as a definition of justice; that was a commonly accepted notion and Socrates assumes that Cephalus in his speech took it for granted. More to the point: when Socrates cushions his question by adding: or is acting in that way sometimes right and sometimes wrong? (*ê kai auta tauta estin eniote men dikaiôs, eniote de adikôs poiein*); we have the whole gist of the Socratic elenchus. Nothing in the sphere of human thought can be said *haplôs*, without qualification. We can always find or invent or imagine a counter-instance, for formulated thought is always – in as much as it is determinate – imperfect. To realize this is to realize the absurdity of the claim (buttressed by the authority of Aristotle) that Socrates sought definitions or that his investigations ended in any definitions. The whole end and purpose of the Socratic elenchus is to make us acknowledge our ignorance of any objective truth and to realize that the only certain and constant thing we know is the activity of *phronêsis* and that the only reality is the reality of the ideas brought forth in and by that activity. Justice is a child of the mind; in the (actual, existent) world it is a homeless fugitive, driven out of every shelter it seeks. Yet it is by that insubstantial creation of the mind that all that is just in the world is just. This is the interpretation of the Socratic principle of philosophical ignorance that I have been at pains to present in all my writings and that I hope to vindicate in this present commentary on the *Republic*.

So when Socrates says that the very actions which are commonly seen as right might at other times be wrong, I would say that this points to a basic principle in Plato's philosophy based on an essential moment in the Socratic elenchus. All things actual, all actual instances of the ideal, are tainted with imperfection and will, under certain conditions, turn into what they are not. I would say that Plato is not exclusively or even primarily concerned with the relativity of the point of view of the viewer. The instances given by Socrates here clearly mean that what is

a just act under certain circumstances can become an unjust act under changed circumstances.

Disregard of this constitutes one weakness of Kant's deontological moral theory. It does not take into account that no definite moral maxim can be absolutely binding under all circumstances. We have to leave room for the living conscience. As Kant himself rightly affirms, only the good will is absolutely good. Or, as Socrates would put it, *phronêsis* is our whole worth.

Scholars make much of the historical fact that, under the rule of the Thirty, some considerable time after the dramatic date and a considerable time before the composition date of the *Republic*, Polemarchus was put to death and the family fortune was lost. They think that Plato wanted his readers to evaluate Cephalus's remarks in this light. I find this a little too far-fetched, telling us more about our scholars' determination to squeeze every last drop out of their erudition than about Plato's intentions. We may draw for ourselves whatever lessons we like from the historical facts, but I don't think that Plato necessarily intended to use these circumstances to drive home the moral that material fortune is insecure. Not only is this a truism of folk wisdom in every culture, but Greek epic and tragic poetry had already underlined it repeatedly. And Cephalus's remarks are quite in character and, in their context, quite sensible. Nevertheless, this is a sample of the variety of erudition that does no harm even if it did not do much good: so let us forgive it them!

When Socrates says, This is not then the definition of justice, Polemarchus breaks in with the assertion, "But it is indeed, if, at any rate, we should believe Simonides" (331d). Thus Plato even in a cursory remark can suggest an important issue for consideration. For in Polemarchus' assertion we have the unquestioning faith in handed-down tradition that is the bane of free thought. More specifically in the present context the question is: Should we submit to authority in matters of right and wrong? Perhaps this question represents the impassable chasm that finally separates religion from philosophy. For a Socrates, the only arbiter in matters of moral right and wrong is that internal monitor in virtue of which human beings are human — intelligence, reason, *nous*, *phronêsis*.

At 331e Socrates refers to one element of the position summed up in the principle of philosophical ignorance, namely, the ineradicable inadequacy of all linguistic expression, and hence of all determinate thought formulation. When Polemarchus has quoted Simonides, Socrates in his customary suave manner, comments, "We cannot easily disbelieve Simonides, such a wise and divine man, but what he means

by this, you, Polemarchus, may know, but I don't." In saying this Socrates puts his finger on the problem of all textual authority, a problem which Plato had to spell out repeatedly, most famously in *Phaedrus*, 274b-278e, and in the Seventh Epistle, 341c-344a. Any fixed text is open to divergent and conflicting interpretations. This is the origin of the heterodoxies which punctuate the history of all established religions, with all their tragic consequences. Words and symbols (except in artificially closed systems) do not have fixed meanings. A word has meaning for each mind only in the particular universe of discourse which is the life of that mind. The task of philosophical discussion is to make us individually attain coherence in our particular universes of discourse.

The preliminary discussion with Polemarchus (331e-336a) has a threefold objective. In common with all the elenctic dialogues, (1) it uncovers the confusion in our common notions, and (2) it suggests that virtue cannot be separated from knowledge. In addition, (3) Socrates affirms one of the main articles of his moral philosophy, that it is never right to harm anyone. In the space of less than a single Stephanus page, he asserts this principle explicitly again and again, as he does in the *Crito*.

The argument in 331c-334b is meant to bring home to us the futility of trying to understand justice – or any other virtue – in terms of any external act or object. Justice, and all virtue, can only be grasped inwardly as a moment in active *phronêsis*. Polemarchus has to admit *ouketi oida egôge hoti elegon*, "I no longer know what I meant" (334b). Then he goes on to re-assert his belief that justice is to do good to friends and to harm enemies, which affords Socrates the opportunity to take up the seminal question: can the good, as good, ever do evil? A question which our religions and our common moral philosophies continue to dodge.

"Is it right for a just person ever to harm anyone?" (335b), asks Socrates, implying of course that it can never be so, for this is a fundamental principle of Socratic ethics. Polemarchus has no hesitation in affirming that it is right to harm bad ones and enemies. Since in this essay I am principally concerned with the role of 'proof' in philosophy, let us see how Socrates 'proves' Polemarchus' contention wrong.

Socrates argues that to harm a horse or a dog makes it worse as a horse or a dog — which is already too broad an assumption. He then postulates that to harm human beings is to make them worse in that which constitutes human excellence. Since justice is a human excellence, people subjected to harm, in becoming worse in human excellence, become less just. All other kinds of excellence working on

another impart to that other their excellence, not its opposite. But if it is right for a just man to harm his enemy, it would follow that a just man, in exercising his proper virtue, makes another worse in that very virtue. He concludes that it is not the work of a just man ever to harm friend or foe, for that is the work of the unjust (335b-d). — These are beautiful sentiments, beautiful and heart-lifting; these are the principles which make life worth living. But what kind of 'proof' is that? Someone who holds it is right to harm his enemy would not be thinking of his enemy's soul at all. And even on the assumption (which can easily be challenged) that to harm an enemy is to make him a worse human being, a Thrasymachus would say, So what? Against Thrasymachus Socrates can only argue — as he does later on — that it is not expedient to make people around you unjust; to which consideration it would be the turn of a Socrates to shrug his shoulder and say, So what? That it is never right to harm anyone cannot be proved; it can only be proclaimed as an ideal, and is only embraced by one who equates his proper excellence and perfection, his spiritual health, with moral goodness.

The argument in 335b-e, then, does not prove anything, as our professional philosophers have not been slow to demonstrate. Instead it offers the ideal of the good person who will always do good and never do any harm. Thrasymachus, to whom the ideal was foreign, was right in objecting that the whole argument with Polemarchus was an exercise on the part of the two conversants in being polite to each other. (In the *Gorgias* Callicles makes much the same objection to Socrates' discussion with both Gorgias and Polus.) Moral argument can only be carried out meaningfully within the framework of shared values. It then shows what judgements of ours are in agreement or in discord with those values. There can be no proof of those values themselves. Those values are creative ideals we embrace as realizing the kind of perfection we elect for ourselves. That is why while the argument with Polemarchus could end in agreement, though not in a logically demonstrable conclusion, the argument with Thrasymachus, however logically tight it might be, could only, on the practical plane, end in mutual rejection. As Socrates says in the *Crito*, *hois oun houtô dedoktai kai hois mê, toutois ouk esti koinê boulê, alla anagkê toutous allêlôn kataphronein, horôntas ta allêlôn bouleumata*, "Between those who think so and those who don't, there is no common understanding; they necessarily look down on each other when they observe each other's decisions" (49d).

The discussion with Polemarchus ends with the acknowledgement that we still have the old question on our hands: *epeidê de oude touto ephanê hê dikaiosunê on oude to dikaion, ti an allo tis auto phaiê einai*;

"Since neither this has been seen to be justice or the just, what else should we say it is?" (336a.)

Thrasymachus in all confidence gives his view of justice as nothing but the advantage of the more powerful: *phêmi gar egô einai to dikaion ouk allo ti ê to tou kreittonos sumpheron* (338c) — the view of all the worldly-wise from the earliest times to our present day. Yet it is a view that does not stand examination, on two accounts. Philosophically, it has the defect shared by all attempts to define an idea in terms external to the idea itself, which, incidentally, is the essence and the fatal fault of all reductionism. Socrates could have easily shown the theoretical inadequacy of this definition, since both the idea of power (or strength) and the idea of advantage are fluid and give scope to variously inconsistent interpretations. Had Socrates been conversing with a sympathetic interlocutor, he would have taken this line as he did in his earlier discussion with Polemarchus. And indeed Socrates in his immediate reply moves in this direction, albeit in a parody, to which Thrasymachus understandably objects (338d). Anyway, this line of argument, even if seriously pursued, would have left Thrasymachus unimpressed. Hence Socrates in the following discussion moves on another plane, for that clever view can be shown – even objectively, on the practical plane – to be riddled with contradictions. A plain, factual, worldly truth that the clever politicians and economists of our own times still refuse to open their eyes to. Yet we should not make the mistake of thinking that that is the ethical answer to the position of Thrasymachus. The ethical answer is not that the doctrine does not work, but that even if it worked it should be rejected because it is morally injurious. That is the answer that the *Republic* as a whole gives.

At 340a-c Cleitophon attempts to save Thrasymachus's definition by introducing the qualification that the just is what the powerful lay down, thinking it to their advantage, whether it be so in fact or not. If we were to accept Cleitophon's amendment we would have a valid legalistic definition of what is right. What the law enjoins is right: that is what any law-court is normally bound to uphold. But that leaves untouched the more vital question of what is right and what is wrong in a more fundamental sense. That is perhaps why Plato puts the proposed amendment on the lips of a bystander and then bypasses it. But although Cleitophon's legalistic tactic would formally save the definition, it would remedy neither the logical deficiency (since, as our Analytical philosophers should have learned by now, every new qualification to a proposition, brings its own nemesis along with it) nor

the practical disadvantages. It is in view of this latter defect that Thrasymachus owes no thanks to Cleitophon.

Thrasymachus, rather than owning the legalistic subterfuge offered by Cleitophon, takes the battle to higher ground. Only the Superman, knowing his own advantage and never making any mistake about it, is entitled to decree what is just and the whole world has to obey (340c-341a). Isn't this the ideal of the angry Jehovah drowning the Egyptians in blood or the angry George W. Bush wiping out Afghan or Iraqi nonentities?

As with Cleitophon, no one can deny Thrasymachus the right to define his terms any way he pleases. As a formal definition, it can be good for certain specific purposes, but it will have the malady of all definitions: being necessarily arbitrary it will prove inadequate once it ventures outside its prescribed area of utility. As an ideal, it can neither be proved nor disproved. It can only be shown to agree or to disagree with the form of perfection we elect for ourselves. This is just what the *Republic* as a whole sets out to do.

A moral ideal is a depiction of perfection. It cannot be proved and it does not need proof. It is not a fact to be empirically verified and it is not a truth to be deductively demonstrated. It is a creation of the living mind and it comes radiant in its own evidence. This is the lesson of the Socratic insight that we insist on being too clever to grasp: by beauty are all beautiful things beautiful.

Socrates does not argue against Thrasymachus, does not refute the thesis of Thrasymachus, but presents his own ideal in place of the other's. He advances, through analogies, the idea that all excellence, *aretê*, fulfils itself in service, in doing good to another. In opposition to Thrasymachus's ideal of self-centred, self-seeking power, Socrates offers the ideal of beneficent, bountiful power. "No science studies or demands the advantage of the more powerful, but that of the weaker which is ruled by it" (342c-d). All science, all art, mother-like, tends not itself but what it breeds and nurtures. All excellence, under this ideal, affirms, sustains, furthers what is placed in its care: all perfection is creative. This is a theme that the *Republic* continuously develops, climaxing in the form of the Good that is the fount of all being, all life, all value, all intelligence. In the *Timaeus* we are told (29d-e) that the maker of the universe made it because, being good, he wished all things to share in his goodness. Plotinus clothed Plato's thought in mystical language and imagery, but he was not untrue to the essence of that thought.

Thrasymachus, who had not been lacking in incivility before, at this point becomes flagrantly abusive (343a). Thrasymachus was not slow-

witted or uneducated. Had Socrates been proving to him a geometrical theorem, even against his own earlier conviction, he would not have resorted to abuse. Why then does he do so now? In philosophical discourse – call it reasoning if you will, provided you be wary of narrowing the meaning of the word – we are not concerned with proof but with the creation of a vision.

The eloquent tirade of Thrasymachus at 343b-344c sets the presuppositions of common morality in the strongest and plainest terms. Thrasymachus of course supposes that Socrates represents the timid, superficial, outward expression of that same common morality, which Thrasymachus rightly ridicules. It was necessary to bring those unspoken presuppositions out in the open to be blown away and replaced by a new understanding of the good, where value, reality and intelligence are all one. For the purpose of the *Republic* is, as Socrates puts it, to portray the whole course of life that we may live most profitably: *diorizesthai holou biou diagôgên, hêi an diagomenos hekastos hêmôn lusitelestatên zôên zôiê* (344e).

Socrates declares himself unconvinced by Thrasymachus's speech and says to him, Convince us. Thrasymachus justly replies, If you have not been convinced by what I have said, what else can I do with you? (345b.) No argument can make us uphold a value. We have to experience goodness, then we need no proof of its value. This is not contrary to Socrates' lifelong conviction of the identity of virtue and intelligence. For the 'knowledge' that is one with virtue is not any demonstrable truth (as the elenctic dialogues amply show) but is the understanding that we attain when we come to see that our true being and our worth as human beings are to be found only in active, creative intelligence. In adding the epithet 'creative' I will not concede to having gone beyond Plato (though elsewhere I do not shirk doing just that) because, as we will see, the form of the Good is ultimately the giver of value and life and being and intelligence.

At 345b-347d Plato was merely smoothing the rough edges of the formal aspect of Thrasymachus's argument. This part of the discussion does not take us beyond the position reached before the tirade of Thrasymachus.

At 347e Socrates in electing to focus on Thrasymachus' contention that the life of the unjust person is superior to that of the just, takes the discussion again back to the higher ground of first principles, to the ideal of the good life. We are to re-affirm what has earlier been affirmed in the *Gorgias*: it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice. No argument can prove this or is needed to prove it. When once we see this principle as an expression of the worth of that in us

which blooms by doing good and withers by doing harm, it shines in its own self-evidence.

After Thrasymachus has presented his case for the superiority of the unjust life, Socrates says to Glaucon, Do you wish us to convince him, if we can, that he is mistaken in what he says? Yet if we go on trading him speech for speech, we would then need to count and weigh points and then need arbiters to decide between us, but if we proceed as we have been doing by winning the agreement of each other, then we ourselves would be both contestants and judges (348a-b). The proper end of philosophy is to give understanding by offering a consistent outlook. There is no final proof. The function of proof and demonstration is to connect particulars within a formal system whose foundations are taken for granted.

The discussion at 348a-e serves to put conventional morality out of the way to focus on the more radical issue raised by Thrasymachus's extreme position.

The argument at 349b-350c is the kind of emotive pleading that makes use of the traditional wisdom enshrined in the common language of a people. It is a good didactic exercise when the presuppositions of the traditional wisdom are held in respect, but Thrasymachus had explicitly rejected those presuppositions. Socrates was wasting his breath, unless he had in view not Thrasymachus but the other members of the audience. Plato perhaps felt he had to insert this episode partly for the drama and partly to round off the formal argument.

The argument at 351a-352d seeks to show that injustice is not even good policy by its own standards.

At the end of his speech at 352b-d Socrates again points out that our purpose is to find out what manner of life we should live, *hontina tropon chrê zên*. That was the whole of Socrates' life-mission, and that is the core of the philosophical endeavour.

At 352d-353c Plato wants to establish in all clarity the concept of the virtue – the excellence – proper to each thing, which is fundamental in the *Weltanschauung* he means to present. In all of Plato's dialogues when an interlocutor says in answer to a question, "I don't understand", that should alert us to expect Plato to be introducing a new or an especially important idea. Of course the idea of virtue as the peculiar excellence of a thing was well-ensconced in Greek language and thought, but the special use Socrates put it to – that *nous* or *phronêsis* is the proper excellence of a human being – was original and all-important and is crucial for the outlook to be presented, the vision to be offered, in the *Republic*. Again, at the risk of being tedious, I have to

reiterate that this was not a thesis to be proved, but an ideal oracularly proclaimed.

The argument at 353d-354c (as at 608d-612a in Book X) depends on the ambiguity of '*psuchê*' which can be taken either as the principle of intelligence (mind) or as the principle of life. So the argument is strictly a bad argument since it plays on the ambiguity of the concept of life, but the conclusion – the just soul and the just man live well, the unjust badly – though inconsequent in strict logic, is a vital element in the total picture of the good life that the *Republic* advocates. But I have to add here that it is unjust to charge Plato with sophistry when he lets a defective argument pass unchallenged. Plato smuggles in an inadequately grounded conclusion only when he has grounds for it that, for practical considerations, cannot be adequately marshalled in a particular context. This should be distinguished from instances where Plato exhibits a patently bad argument as a challenge for the reader's critical powers.

Throughout the argument with Thrasymachus, all that Socrates succeeds in doing is to show that Thrasymachus's statements are not logically flawless; but what statements ever are? (See the section on 'dialectic' below.) Socrates cannot shake Thrasymachus's conviction, because that conviction proceeds from the assumption that material 'goods' are the only 'good'. That, as much as Socrates' position, is not a position that can be proved or disproved. It is a choice of the kind of person one wants to be. When Milton's Satan declares, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n ", that might or might not have been a bad choice, but, in terms of his preferred scale of values, not an illogical one.

The doctrine of Thrasymachus rules the politics of the world today. Is there any hope that humankind will one day recognize that it is not this but the 'foolish' doctrines of Socrates and of Jesus of Nazareth that can secure for them peace and happiness? Plato kept hoping against hope to the end of his days. Those among us who hold on to the belief that it is not by bread alone that man liveth have no alternative but to live in that hope. Plato's *Republic* seeks to show that that hope, if nothing but a dream, is yet the sanest of all possible dreams.

After all, it would not have been in character for Socrates or for Plato to make us believe that we had reached a sure conclusion. As Socrates confesses in the last passage in Book I (354a-c), the whole conversation with Thrasymachus proceeded erratically and was indeed a wild chase. If we don't know what justice is, how can we say whether it is a virtue or not, or whether the just are happy or not? And as we

shall learn from the *Republic*, we cannot understand justice without placing it in a panorama encompassing the whole of reality.

If then we cannot have a definition of justice, how is a book that begins explicitly as a quest for the meaning of justice to proceed? At the end of the discussion in Book I, even the decent and generous Glaucon and Adeimantus are not satisfied that Socrates has demonstrably established his position. They ask to be convinced. How does the rest of the *Republic* seek to do that? By weaving a tapestry of beautiful ideas and ideals that create an aesthetically pleasing view, in which argument and proof in the strict sense only serve to clear an ambiguity at one point or link certain concepts in an intelligible pattern at another point. That is why I insist that philosophy is in the end and essentially oracular; it does not give us knowledge of anything outside ourselves, but creates for us a perfection that we can find realized in ourselves. And I maintain that in saying this I am in agreement with Plato's idea of the highest intelligence represented in the simile of the divided line by the upper section of the upper division.

The model

Glaucon's challenge at the opening of Bk II sets the tone for the rest of the *Republic*. "Socrates, do you wish us to appear to have been convinced or truly to be convinced that in every way being just is superior to being unjust?" (357a.) By means of refutation and proof in what preceded, Socrates had produced a semblance of persuasion among his audience, but for them to be genuinely persuaded he had to resort to other means. In what follows of the *Republic* there is no refutation and no proof. There is also no real dialogue. This has often been noted, but its real significance, I believe, has not been grasped. When pointed out by commentators, it is usually displayed as a defect. I, on the other hand, maintain it reveals the true character of philosophical thinking. Had Plato so chosen, he could have padded the conversation with more give and take, with objections and rebuttals, producing a voluminous work several times the length of the *Republic* as we have it. That would have obscured the true character of the work as I see it, but would not have changed it. It would have remained true, as it is now true, that the work does not offer proof of a thesis or set of theses, but offers a vision. Let me add that the vision is a rational vision inasmuch as the concepts, out of which the whole is constituted, cohere, and the whole is intelligible. It is in this sense that a

philosophical work is rational, not in the sense that its conclusions are logically demonstrable.

At 357b-d, by a dramatic ruse, Plato makes Glaucon introduce the first of the concepts he (Plato) will use in building his intended *Weltanschauung*: the distinction between (a) a good as an end in itself and not as a means, such as pure delight or innocuous pleasure; (b) a good that is both end and means, such as thought and sight and health; and (c) a relative good that is only accounted good as a means to some other good, such as physical exercise [odd for a Greek to put physical exercise in this class] and medication and business. This is immediately accepted by Socrates without argument or proof. [At 357c *eidos* is simply 'kind' or 'class' as in common usage, not in the special Platonic sense of 'form'.]

Then comes the crucial question: in which of these classes are we to place justice. Socrates' unhesitant answer is: in the fairest class, that of goods to be valued both in themselves and as means to other goods (357d-358a). This sets down the formal claim that the *Republic* will go on to vindicate, not *ordine geometrico*, à la Spinoza, but by housing it in an inherently intelligible landscape.

Glaucon continues to draw the blueprint of the project. People in general think that justice, when adopted, is adopted as a necessity, injustice being obviously more profitable to the unjust person, provided only that s/he can get away with it. He wants to be shown that even if justice were attended by no benefit and injustice rewarded by all that is popularly accounted desirable, still justice would be the better choice. When he says that he wants to be shown what justice and what injustice are in themselves and what effect they have on the soul – *kai tina echei dunamin auto kath' hauto enon en tēi psuchēi* (358b) – he is bringing into play the basic principle of Socrates' moral position, that the whole worth of a human being resides in the integrity of her/his mind (*psuchē*).

In 359c-360b we see Plato did not have the heart to waste the opportunity to tell a charming *muthos*, spreading it over more than 200 words when he could have got to the point in ten. We should keep this in mind when we come to consider Plato's treatment of poetry.

As a matter of fact, we don't have to wait long before we are given early notice of Plato's case against – not poetry, but – the poets. The long, vehement speech of Adeimantus extending over more than five closely-packed Stephanus pages (362d-367e) has a double purpose. It is a strongly indignant indictment of the common 'wisdom' (I am at a loss for a word to cover both morality and theology) disseminated then among the Greeks by their 'holy scriptures', just as the very same mix is

disseminated in our own day by our various holy scriptures. The speech also serves to isolate, with the neatness of a laboratory test specimen, the issue to be addressed by the *Republic*: What is the good life?

In 368c-369a Socrates proposes a plan for the quest. We are to build a large-scale model which may help us discern with greater ease the particulars of the kind of life we are seeking. Instead of trying to view justice (righteousness) in a good person, let us try to examine it in a good city. Naturally he would give thought to the political conditions needed to provide a favourable ambience for the good life, and he does that amply; but this does not mean that we have to attach more weight to the particular arrangements of the model than Plato explicitly tells us to. Plato may have hoped that in portraying his model city he would incidentally be making a contribution to political thinking – an aim which was always close to his mind and heart –, but in the structure of the *Republic* the just city was primarily a 'classroom exhibit' to help towards an understanding of the good life.

A city (any human association) comes into being when individuals (or small groups? — families: the family perhaps shows that the drive towards not only mutual help but unsolicited and unrequited helpfulness is primitive) cannot fend for themselves (369b). (Is this not the starting point for Hobbes too?)

Plato has put up a city, based on need and utility (369a-371e). We have not considered the dealings or relations between the citizens. The city is a bare skeleton. Then he asks, Where in our city is justice or injustice? And with which of its constituents has justice found its way into the city? (371e.) Here perhaps we have the seed of a most important principle: the reality of justice can only be found in the whole in which it has its being. The reality of any pure idea can only be found in a whole; the idea is a creative expression of the whole. So when we take our quest to a higher plane and seek the reality of a richer and profounder idea of justice, we find it leading us to the form of the Good in which all being, all life, all intelligence, all value are one whole.

At 371b-c we hear the voice of the ascetic Plato. Art and poetry are here lumped together with all luxury. If, as we shall see, Plato's main charge against the poets – not against poetry – is that they are the propagators of a false theology and a false morality, here he objects to art and poetry along with unnecessary finery on the ground of their 'softening' effect on character. I feel that this was not the attitude of Socrates. Socrates did not personally care much for food or drink or bodily comfort, but he did not find anything wrong with such pleasures in themselves and did not condemn those who could enjoy them. (We

may note in passing that all of this has nothing to do with any argument for or demonstration of a given theoretical thesis.)

If war and the need for an army result from unhealthy living and would be non-existent if all humanity lived in healthy communities, as we learn at 373b-e, then the guardians of Plato's 'ideal' city cannot represent an 'eternal' necessity. In a truly ideal society they would have no place. They are only there because human society is actually corrupt. The architecture of Plato's city therefore cannot claim to be an apt representation of the Good. We cannot truly behold the pure idea of justice in it because its justice is a second-rate justice, compromised by the necessities of a world that is far from wise.

Of course Plato could never forget his worries and concerns for his actual world. It is no wonder then that he should go beyond what is needful for constructing a model for the purpose in hand. So at 374a-e when we find him earnestly defending the idea of a professional army we cannot be wrong in thinking that he has his eye on the situation of the Hellenic world of his day.

Early education

At 375a-376d Plato quietly brings in the question of education and then, as if accidentally, slips in what will turn out to be the major theme of the *Republic* – the nature and nurture of the philosophical character.

Plato proposes that the guardian should be a philosopher (375e-376d). On what grounds? What argument supports this proposal? That the dog, to which the guardian has been playfully likened, is gentle towards those it knows and ferocious towards those it does not know, and is therefore a philosopher. Could anyone (apart from our present-day academic philosophers!) imagine Plato advancing this as a serious argument? Of course not. It is a literary stratagem for introducing a theme which has a place in the total, inherently intelligible vision; neither the single theme nor the total vision needed or were amenable to any extraneous proof.

We begin the education of our guardians, following the traditional system with its two branches of gymnastics for the good of the body and — let us say culture to render the Greek *mousikê* which for the Greeks had a much wider connotation than our word 'music' (376e). Plato elsewhere will speak of music in the narrower sense and will consider the role of melody and 'harmony' in moulding the soul, but here takes up the verbal content that accompanies the music and at once divides that content into two classes, the true and the false, which

immediately puts our finger on what worries Plato when he considers poetry. Plato has nothing against telling *muthoi* and inventing fables; he is full of that. But myth when fed into the soul as truth is poison, and when the moral of the myth is immoral (pardon the pun), it is deadly. And Greek epics had both faults: they were taken as true reports of the gods and heroes (demigods) and of their doings, and the characters and doings of those gods and heroes were often far from virtuous. This should go a long way towards explaining Plato's hostility to an art that was otherwise dear to his heart.

The telling of *muthoi* and the singing of songs will always remain part of our educational curriculum. But these must be of the right sort (377b-c). Plato finds little in the current literature that should not be thrown away. We have developed a deeply ingrained revulsion to the idea of censorship, with good reason. But can we really do without censorship? Can we leave our youth and our children prey to pernicious influences from this source and that? Plato's error was not in affirming the need for censorship but in trusting that power to the state authorities. But then Plato was speaking of an ideal state. How can we organize the exercise of necessary censorship in such a way as to avoid or minimize its evils? This is a practical, not a philosophical, problem, and the solution can only be sought by the methods of trial and error, and there need not be a uniform solution under all circumstances. What concerns us here is to realize that it is unfair, uncritical, and unhistorical to lay on Plato's shoulders the onus of the evils that twenty-four centuries of human experience have taught us to discover in censorship by unquestioned authority, even reputedly spiritual or moral authority. More relevant to our immediate context – the examination of the role of poetry in education – is to note that Plato does not exclude all poetry — some *muthoi* and stories are needed to mould the souls of the young. At this stage we are not giving them knowledge, we are not inculcating any beliefs, but are giving them beautiful models and images to nourish their minds. But we are to throw away most of what we now have — which takes us back to Plato's objection to the content of the epics and drama of his day.

The agitated and vehement language in which 'Socrates' denounces the major epics (377e-378a) should leave us in no doubt as to the ground on which Plato finds it necessary to keep the poets and their works out of the ideal state. I think Plato's criticism of all imitative art is a different matter and the place to consider that is when we come to Book X of the *Republic*.

At 378b Plato is already referring to the model city as 'our city' which indicates that beside the role of model city in the argument of the

Republic, Plato could not help dreaming of making his world, our world, a better world. For we may reasonably suppose that Plato never forgot his political aspirations. He had kept away from Athenian politics not by choice but by force of circumstance. The Academy willingly helped whenever its help was sought by Hellenic cities. Plato's Syracusan venture is well-known. He ended his life drawing the plan of a more practical model state in the *Laws*. In this Plato was different from Socrates, who was concerned with enlightening the individual. I hope my words here will help put in perspective my objection to seeing the *Republic* primarily – often solely – as a political work. In considering the political dimension of the *Republic* I would only insist on two points. (1) We have to separate the requirement that philosophers rule or rulers become philosophical – about which Plato was in dead earnest – from the detailed arrangements for the constitution of the model city, some of which Plato may have wished to propose for serious consideration, others may have been there simply to give shape to the maquette, while others still may have been meant to shock and provoke discussion. (2) Whatever we think and whatever Plato may have thought of the political element in the *Republic* – and this is the more important of the two points I want to insist upon – that forms no more than a subsidiary theme in the *Republic*. The primary theme, one of vastly greater importance for us and, I maintain, for Plato, is the superiority of the philosophical life.

Poets must depict God as God really is (379a). So our examination of the problem of education leads to theology. But who will tell us what God really is? Not the inspired prophet or poet but the philosopher. And where will the philosopher find an account of the true nature of God? Nowhere but in her/his own mind. So the philosopher actually makes God in her/his own image. And it has always been like that: peoples have always created their gods, and by their gods you can judge them.

At 379b Plato gives us a foretaste – a preview, if you wish – of the form of the Good, which is the heart of the vision the *Republic* offers us. We may note that what is said of God here – that he is good, and inflicts no harm, causes no harm – is the exact parallel of what Socrates in the *Crito* expects of the good and just person (49a-e). So once more we see the philosopher making God in her/his own image.

Plato affirms that the Good is not the cause of all, but only of what is good, not of what is ill (379b-380c). This is an article of faith and an essential element in the total vision he is presenting. But not until we come to the *Timaeus*, with its principle of Necessity, opposed to the principle of Reason, do we come to any serious consideration in the

works of Plato of the problem of the source of evil on the metaphysical plane. And the Necessity of the *Timaeus* is not exactly evil, but that's a question we cannot go into in the present context. Elsewhere in the middle dialogues Plato echoes the Orphic/Pythagorean doctrine of the body as evil, but in those instances his main concern is to affirm the superiority of the life of intelligence. Anyway, the question of the problem of evil in Plato's philosophy deserves a separate study, taking into account the dialogues of the third period, principally the *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws*. It is not possible to do that in the present context. In human affairs, the source of all wrongdoing, for both Socrates and Plato, is want of *phronêsis*. Here, Plato's object is simply to show the poets' error in ascribing evil deeds and evil acts to the gods. The particulars of the atrocities and evils perpetrated by the Hesiodic and Homeric gods need not detain us long; they may be of interest to the anthropologist, but not to the philosopher except in so far as they remind us of the parallels that we still have in all of the established religions — Hindu, Judaic, Christian, Moslem, all alike.

In 380d-381c we have a sustained argument for the tenet that God (or a god) must be simple and changeless: as good an argument as can be, but does it prove anything? The argument simply presents the idea of a perfect and changeless being and all the steps of the argument do no more than display the idea. Besides, if we were to take the statement that God is absolutely simple and changeless seriously and strictly we would end either with the One of Parmenides or the stale motionless mover of Aristotle, neither of which can account for the bustling world as we have it. (See my *Let Us Philosophize*, Book Two.) I do not claim that Plato would have accepted this conclusion. My point is that in philosophy the function of an argument is to elucidate and amplify creative ideas, whose only justification is in the power they give us to see the givennesses of experience in a whole that is inherently intelligible. In the present essay I seek to show that this is true of the argument of the *Republic* as a whole.

In the whole of the discussion of what is right and what is wrong in the work of the poets there is no attempt to argue for this or that or to prove anything. Moral values and ideals are taken for granted. In 392a-c Adeimantus unhesitatingly admits that we are already agreed that the just life is superior to the unjust. In fact, from the moment Thrasymachus withdraws, Socrates no longer argues but positively advocates a way of life. Because I know that my position is open to serious misunderstanding, I have to go out of my way here to say that in maintaining that philosophy does not establish conclusions by argument but creatively offers points of view, visions, ideals, I am not

ruling out the role of rational criticism. Philosophical thinking is anything but dogmatic. How I can reconcile these apparently contradictory claims can only be seen when we come to the examination of dialectical thinking. (See also "Philosophy as Prophecy" and the shorter version, "A Confessed Heresy".)

At 392d Plato introduces the theme of *mimêsis*. It seems that for some private reason, which I cannot lay my finger upon, Plato had a profound antipathy to all modes of imitation. He carries this into his metaphysics and lets it lead him to the denunciation of all art. I think this would be a good subject for classicists to explore.

At 394d we have the deservedly oft-cited dictum, *hopêi an ho logos hôsper pneuma pherêi, tautêi iteon* (wherever the *logos* like a wind carries us, there we must follow), which should however be taken with some circumspection. The *logos* that is to carry us where it will and that we have to follow is not the *logos* of any formal argument. The formal steps of an argument are always vacuous and bear no fruit. It is the intrinsic logic of the notions and principles with which we start, and which are always oracularly introduced, that leads us to the fruit which is already in the seed. The argument simply unfolds and exhibits and displays in a coherent whole what was there already. So the whole of the *Republic* is the flower and fruit of the germinal Socratic idea that *nous* and *phronêsis* are our whole worth, our whole reality, and all the reality we ever know.

Whatever we may think of Plato's draconian expulsion of all mimetic art (395b-e), we cannot fail to understand and sympathize with his dread of the ill effects on the young of the representation of evil characters and evil deeds. This point hardly calls for any elaboration, for it is a problem that haunts every civilized society today.

We may note here that (as Penelope Murray points out in her Introduction to *Plato on Poetry*, 1996) in classical Greece there was no separate word for what we call art. The building of a ship or a house, the making of a pair of shoes or of a harness, the composing of an ode or a tragedy, all equally were *poiêsis* and *technê*. And – as in all civilizations before our dissolute age – all *technê* was to serve life. Just as the building of a ship or the making of a pair of shoes could not be justified except on the basis of serving a good purpose, so the composition of an ode could not be justified unless it served a good purpose. Very sensible. This is not utilitarianism. For a song of pure joy is an affirmation of life and serves life. But what do films filled with violence and pornography serve? They do not affirm but subvert and destroy life.

His revulsion at the ills of the Athenian democracy where everyone meddled in everything (397d-e) clearly led Plato to opt for the other extreme where nobody was to step out of her/his narrow circle of specialization. He did not take into consideration that a rich and well-balanced personality has to be multi-dimensional and to have varied interests.

That the good man is sufficient unto himself and will not be much affected by the loss of a friend or kin is a sentiment found in a still more stark (I could almost say heartless) form in Spinoza. But does this not leave us with an arid humanity? The Stoic *autarkeia* is all right in its proper place, but a rich life is a life full of concern and care for others. A god complete in her/him/self and self-contained is a wretched thing.

We may be justified in saying that Plato was rash in thinking that we can or should make our good citizen conform to a given model. And if we could erase all softness and all weakness from our citizens, would that necessarily be a good thing? With the benefit of twenty-four centuries of additional human experience and experiment we may feel confident in saying that Plato was wrong, but have we succeeded in finding the right formula yet? Our human society is still riddled and burdened – within nations – with violence and crime, with pornography and drug-addiction, and – between nations – with injustice and rapaciousness and hate. When we say that Plato's remedy for the ills of human society was not good, we should in fairness admit that he was grappling with a problem that is still on our hands.

In 401a-402c we already have the gist of the *Republic*, the vision of the good life that it proclaims, for, as in a good symphony, the principal theme appears and reappears fugitively before it finally receives its full development. The basis of a good life is a good education. And a good education begins with the imbibing of goodness from the surroundings of the unfolding soul. Beauty, goodness, and intelligence are one, or are dimensions of the one perfection that is found in all that is whole and sound. A melody, a gracious form, a beautiful tale, nurture the soul. Then the soul, awakened and nurtured by beauty and good deeds, by love given and received, finds within itself the forms of goodness and beauty and fairness which shed on its world intelligibility and harmony and loveliness. And then all discord and harm and destruction are repugnant to it. It is the same vision and the same process that we find in the *Symposium*. If we could give such an education to all humans, would we not have removed all the ills of the world? And is this not a prophecy in the best sense of the word? It is a prophecy that the *Republic* sets out, not to prove, but to proclaim, develop, clarify, and

display. Whatever we think of the particulars of Plato's arrangements (educational, social, political), the underlying principles and the underlying vision are what our ailing humanity stands most in need of.

In the Allegory of the Cave (and in the *Symposium* and in the *Phaedo*) we are told that we learn to recognize the forms by first encountering their images in particular things. At 402b we are told that we would not recognize the images of the letters reflected on the surface of water or a mirror before we knew the letters themselves. The contradiction is only apparent; it is the contradictoriness that is inseparable of all determinate formulation of thought. The forms come from the mind, arise in the mind, but they only arise when there is occasion for them to arise, when there is a particular situation in which they can find application. In other words, the universal is always occasioned by a particular situation, but is not found in the particular, does not come from the particular.

The beautiful passage in 402a-403c both recalls the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium* and foreshadows the Allegory of the Cave at the beginning of Book VII of the *Republic* — no wonder, for Plato's thought is a true symphony.

Plato's regimen for his guardians (403e-404e) may be a little touched with Pythagorean asceticism, but on the whole it is sane and in accord with common wisdom. But would it not also be a rational choice if one deliberately chose to indulge oneself now and then with some delicacy to add colour to one's life even if that necessarily meant somewhat shortening one's days on earth? Throughout our life we have to make choices involving sacrifices. A wise person is one who is aware of the two terms of the exchange. The 'choice' is foolish when it is blind to the sacrifice to be made, and is irrational and immoral when the sacrifice is of something that makes life worth living. But the sacrifice of one's own life or of a part of one's life is not in itself irrational, because we are finite beings and only live by constantly dying.

Plato's medical ethics (406a-b) has a clear-cut answer to problems about which endless controversies are raging among thinkers of our day. For Plato, if ill health hinders a person from doing her/his work, then that person's life is not worth living, and to prolong that life by medication is not justifiable. Put in these terms, I can see nothing wrong with this position. I hold that all life is valuable. But what is life? Life is creative activity on a certain plane of being. When that creativity is denied, then a human individual is no longer a person, and the body should be allowed to go the way of all body. I used the words 'work' and 'creative activity': these I interpret very broadly. A bedridden

old man who can smile and say a kind word to his nurse and tell a fairy-tale to his grandchild is doing good work. But if the sick person, old or young, suffers great pain, then it is for her/him to decide if it is worthwhile to continue living. Plato's criteria for a worthwhile life may have been narrow, austere, influenced by traditional values that we no longer subscribe to, but in principle he was right.

Citizens who are incurably unhealthy in body, then, we should allow to die in peace, but citizens who are incurably corrupt in soul we should ourselves put to death (410a). This brings to a head the question of the value of life. Must we always, under all circumstances, preserve life? Our contemporary philosophers think that this question and questions of a similar nature are capable of being settled by logical argument. They do not realize that the limits of logical argument do not extend beyond bloodless abstractions. Words that have any content – and if philosophy is to be relevant to life its words must be living – have roots that strike deep and spread and intertwine with all that is.

Beside logical paradoxes, there is another class of insoluble problems, the class of problems that has – wrongfully, in my view – come to usurp the name of metaphysics. Logical paradoxes are spurious problems, trick problems, that only seem to be insoluble because they intrude into the problem an element extraneous to the original system of concepts concerned. The other problems, which Analytic philosophers dub metaphysical, are genuinely insoluble and for a different reason. They are not logical or mathematical problems operating within artificially closed systems, where alone symbols and equations and demonstrative proofs are applicable, but are substantive problems dealing with entities embedded in a meaningful world. Here there can be no fixity in the concepts and the language can only be arbitrary and valid for a particular purpose. Here no meaningful statement can be stamped right or wrong, as in the case of closed formal systems, but only intelligible or unintelligible, relevant or irrelevant. Apparently conflicting statements are not mutually exclusive, one being right the other must be wrong, but are expressions of different points of view. It is folly when the holders of such different points of view argue against each other. With goodwill and an open mind, each can come to understand the other's point of view, see things from the other's standpoint, without abandoning her/his own view. This is true both of controversies about theoretical issues like the nature of truth, qualia, etc., and of debates about practical issues in the areas of bioethics, jurisprudence, education, etc.

Throughout the discussion of education in Books II and III, *psuchê* refers to the whole personality of a person, what we may best call mind.

And it is clear from the whole discussion that Plato's concern is to have a well-balanced and wholesome personality, to realize the life befitting a rational being. The city he will go on to construct is a parable representing the well-balanced human being. In working out the constitution of his city Plato fails to notice or does not care to notice that the majority of the citizens of his model city fail in what he is most concerned to achieve. With the exception of those at the topmost layer, all the others are fragmented characters. That is why I tend to think that for Plato the city-state of the *Republic* was mainly a classroom model.

But if the ideal city is only a large-scale model of justice in the individual, why does Plato, it may be asked, go to such lengths in laying down rules and criteria for the selection of guardians and rulers and the like? The answer is two-fold. In the first place, Plato the poet cannot find it in his heart to neglect adding the finishing touches to a good story. In the second place, Plato who never lost his interest in politics, could not waste the opportunity of planting into the imaginative account views, criticisms, and suggestions that could be of practical value. For instance in the whole of 424e-427a Plato has clearly forgotten about the ideal city and was thinking of actual ills besetting Greek cities of his day, presumably Athens in the first place. But this does not justify our regarding the constitution of the *Republic* city as a blueprint for an actual city. Besides, even if Plato were in dead earnest about the ideal city, I would still maintain that the – under this hypothesis, incidental – account of the philosopher and of the Reality of which the philosopher is enamoured, is what is of lasting value for us.

Can anyone really believe that Plato was serious about the lie to be instilled into the citizens of his city, rulers and ruled? (414b-415d.) I will not even attempt to show how absurd such a view is. Does this not suggest that the whole of the *Republic* is no less a *muthos* than the *muthos* of, say, the *Phaedrus*? — a *muthos* pregnant with meaning and with wisdom, which mocks all literal truth?

Since my subject in this essay is the argument of the *Republic*, or the role of argument in the *Republic*, and since I regard the constitution of the ideal city as primarily a parable, though Plato does not waste the chance of throwing in a practical hint here or a piece of political wisdom there, I pass over most of the detailed arrangements for the foundation and running of the city without comment.

Does not the little farcical scenario of one competent boxer fighting two or more rich opponents (422b-c) tell us that Plato at times is not so much concerned to prove a point as to create an impression? It is just the kind of argument carried by a good comedy of manners.

Plato's dread of innovation (424b-c) was probably historically and culturally grounded. In pure theory it could sound plausible: if we once establish the perfect constitution, then any change would presumably be for the worse. But can we ever have perfection in a world where existence is synonymous with finitude and imperfection? We can only have, ideally, constant creative evolution re-affirming values in original orientations. Transience is inseparable of existence. Change we must. And even though we have no guarantee that all change will be for the better, it is a law of life that to live is to be at risk.

That said, can we say that Plato exaggerated the pernicious effects of wayward innovations in song or play or art? Must we not confess that here is another area where we are unable to strike the balance between, on the one hand, permitting necessary innovation and experimentation, and, on the other hand, excluding vicious fashions? And it is again an area where there can be no hard and fast rules. And again in principle Plato's solution was on the right track: the only safeguard of civilization resides in an education that instils into the souls of the young beauty and critical thinking.

Righteousness discovered

Plato having completed his first outline of the model city now takes us on a long rambling search for the quarry, justice. I simply refuse to believe that Plato could have meant his readers to take the hide-and-seek game he plays in 427c-434d seriously. The Plato that gave us the insightful critique of the *Euthyphro* and the penetrating analyses of the *Protagoras* (whether the *Protagoras* was written before or after the *Republic* does not matter), could not have thought or pretended that such playful jugglery could be regarded as a rational argument or rational inquiry. It is all done for effect, like a secondary theme in a drama. And where does the search take us? To the discovery or rather confession that we had right at the start had the quarry in our hands and had ourselves let it loose (432d-433b): it is nothing but the principle on which we chose to found our city, that every person should attend to his own business, *ta hautou prattein*, and so we were all the time not proving or inquiring but unfolding an idea with which we had started.

Those Analytic philosophers who delight in tearing a Platonic argument to pieces, should do well to consider that Plato would be the first to know that not a bit of the 'argument' could stand to a truly Socratic examination. Plato, being Plato, would know quite well that none of his readers – at any rate no readers he would care for – could

take that argument for a conclusive demonstration. Was Plato fooling then? No; he was all the time painting a picture, using elements which had their justification in their intrinsic worth and in their contribution to the beauty of the whole. I keep harping on this because I am convinced that philosophy, which is of the utmost importance for human well-being, suffers most gravely from our failure to understand the true nature of philosophical thinking, and it is this failure that incapacitates philosophy to do all the good it can in fact do.

'Socrates' says, "I think our city, if it has been rightly constituted, will be perfectly good" (427e). By what logic? We could have chosen to make our city mighty or opulent or an 'epicurean' paradise; we chose instead to make it morally good. That was not something we were led to by reasoning or argument, but something we demanded because it accorded with what we found of highest worth within ourselves. And at the end of our search (444c-445b) we will find that we have got back to what Socrates had always simply affirmed, that the good proper to a human being is to have a wholesome soul. So we will find in our city the traditional Greek virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance (there is really no satisfactory alternative to this good, old, now outmoded word), and justice (427e).

The conclusion that virtue is health and beauty and well-being of the soul, and vice illness and deformity and weakness of the soul (444d-e), is nothing new. It runs throughout the early dialogues. We did not need any proof for that, any more than we need a proof for: Blessed are the pure in spirit. It is a prophecy proclaimed, not a proposition to be demonstrated.

Plato, having placed wisdom in the ruling class and courage in the warrior class, is loth to place temperance in the working class (430d-432a), perhaps partly out of his aristocratic disdain for labour. After all, why could not contentment, and reasonableness, and obedience – which can all be regarded as aspects of temperance – be regarded as the proper virtue of the humbler section of the citizens? And the same logic by which temperance is shown to be diffused in the whole city could show wisdom and courage to be the property of the whole in the same manner. But Plato, beside his temperamental aversion to ascribing temperance to his third-class citizens, has a deeper and more immediate motive. He was using the examination of temperance as a platform for the presentation of his new psychological theory, the theory of the tripartite soul. We may perhaps reasonably wonder whether the constitution of the city with its three classes was modelled on the tripartite soul, or the tripartition of the soul was suggested by the model of the city. In what follows I will deal with the doctrine of the

tripartite soul only briefly. There may be occasion to return to this question elsewhere.

In the early dialogues, as in the *Republic* up to this point, the soul was simply mind or the whole character or personality. For Socrates the soul was that in us which thrives by good deeds and is harmed by bad deeds. In the *Phaedo* Plato opposes the soul to the body and is not content with affirming the distinction of the two as aspects of one whole – as I take Socrates' distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible to have been – but emphasizes the separateness of the two. Thus in the *Phaedo* the soul is the seat of *phronēsis* and evil resides in the body and not in part of the soul. In the *Phaedrus* we have the image of the soul as a chariot with Reason holding the reins, and the noble steed and the unruly horse representing the spirited and the lascivious parts of the soul. Whether the *Phaedrus* image was an early adumbration of the doctrine later developed in the *Republic* or a later graphic representation, is a question which, I think, cannot be settled with assurance one way or the other. In any case, I believe that both the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* belong to a period of time later than that of the *Phaedo* and that the doctrine of the tripartite soul was a new departure for Plato, and, to my mind, a regrettable one. I believe it has done and continues to do great harm. But I reserve the articulation of my position on this question for a special study.

At this point I have to repeat that in these essays my purpose is not exegetic. I do not purport to present what Plato said or thought. What Plato said is there for everyone to read. What Plato thought is anyone's guess, and no one's guess is in principle better than another's. My purpose is, as I have put it elsewhere, to enter into dialogue with Plato, and to offer the philosophy I come out with from this dialogue.

The phenomenon of mastering oneself or succumbing to one's desires which at 430e-431b is interpreted in terms of one part or the other of the soul having the upper hand was examined in the *Protagoras* in terms of processes taking place entirely in the mind and the experience of being overcome by the worse desire was shown to be a case of ignorance or want of understanding (*Protagoras*, 352a-360e). That, I believe, was the genuine Socratic position, and, in my opinion, the wiser and saner explanation. Thus instead of regarding mental conflict as a contest between different parts or faculties of the soul (person), it would be better to regard it as competition between different values for priority.

When we find in the just person the same elements that we found in – or, more truly, we put into – the just city (435b-c), or the other way round, we are not discovering – in either case – any factual truth, not

reporting any objective state of affairs, but are creating an intelligible myth that gives us a certain vision. I have to insist on this even at the risk of boredom, because that is the view of the nature of philosophical thinking that I believe we stand in need of if philosophy is to continue to be viable and of paramount value for human life. Philosophy does not give us truth, demonstrable or otherwise, but gives us vision through creative, self-confessed myth.

Plato tells us that we cannot settle such a question – that of the constitution of the soul – by the methods we have been adopting; the way to that goal is a longer one (435c-d). Whatever Plato may have meant by that, one thing is clear, that he did not regard the preceding argument as adequate or conclusive; in other words, it was not meant to be of the nature of a mathematical demonstration. I feel foolish in having to state this, but when Analytical philosophers vaunt themselves on picking holes in such arguments, they are assuming that they are dealing with demonstrations of that nature. The proper way to criticize a philosophical position is to offer a perspective that is more coherent or more in accord with values and principles we stand for.

Thus when 'Socrates' says to Glaucon: In my opinion, we shall never know exactly about this by the methods we have been employing, Plato is clearly hinting that in all we have been saying we have not arrived at any exact knowledge. Later on, when we come to consider dialectic, we shall see that we can never have any exact knowledge of anything. All we have is the understanding we attain in the seeking, in the exercise of intelligence; but the determinate outcome of the seeking, once regarded as final truth, as exact knowledge, proves fallacious.

If we start with the idea of separate faculties in the soul, then of course it becomes nonsensical to say we desire by thought or that we think by the spirited element (436a-441c): that would go against the grammar of our elected universe of discourse. But if we regard a person as a whole, a mind, that in acting implements or brings into play one thought or another, weighs one evaluation against another, then a warrior, fearful of death and loving life, yet choosing to face certain death to preserve something more valuable than her/his individual life is not a contradiction.

At 437d-e Plato isolates the idea of thirst which is simply thirst, not qualified in any way; it is neither thirst for hot drink or cold drink, nor for much drink or little drink. What would Berkeley say to this? That there can never be any actual thirst that is not qualified in one or another of these ways. The idea of thirst that is simply thirst is a pure abstraction. Plato would be the first to acknowledge that though we

have the idea of a triangle that is neither equilateral nor isosceles nor scalene, yet an actual triangle must be one or the other. So here, while the simple idea of thirst can have its place in our conceptual equipment, when we are speaking of impulses and motives dictated by states of the body, this abstract thirst is out of place.

Plato develops the idea of the parallel qualification of relatives and correlatives to counter Socrates' analysis of mental conflict – as presented in the *Protagoras* – by reducing thirst, for example, to a desire for drink pure and simple. But then the abstracted desire, stripped of any connection with an idea, becomes nothing but a bodily condition, of which the mind takes note, and then decides (if the mind comes in at all) whether to attach greater weight to its satisfaction or to the good that would result from refusing it that satisfaction.

We may note that because, apparently, Plato was specially attached to his new psychological theory, we find him in this section drawing distinctions more carefully and connecting the steps of the argument more coherently than in the search to locate the different virtues in the separate classes of the city.

Righteousness in the individual

Just as we have been led back to the good old Socratic position that all virtue is *phronêsis* and nothing else, so in depicting the features of the just person in 442e-443b there is no pretence of argument but a straightforward affirmation of the traditional characteristics of a good citizen.

So at 444a we are satisfied we have found the just man and the just city and justice itself. But how? We have said goodbye to the theoretical search of Book I and simply set up the ideal whose image we find in our own soul, if it is a healthy soul; or perhaps it would be truer to say, we have set up an image of the reality we find in our own soul. That is what I maintain all genuine philosophy to be: a creative representation of the integrity of the intelligence that is our reality and that is all the reality and the only reality that we know.

And so to crown our search (444c-445b) we go back to what Socrates had put so simply and so touchingly in his homely conversation with the good old Crito (*Crito*, particularly 47d-49e), a conversation of which the present passage is a mere shadow, for indeed nothing could excel those beautiful and profound words.

Women and the family

The section of the *Republic* beginning with the last page of Book IV and extending over the first half of Book V, covering regulations for women, the family, and the conduct of war (445c-471c), has received more attention and comment than any other. As it does not relate directly to the theme of my present essay and as I do not think I have anything of value to contribute here, I will pass over this section with only perhaps a word here or there, where a point seems to be relevant to my theme.

At 453b-c Plato argues on behalf of objectors to the proposal that women should be given the same education and assigned the same duties as men. He gives as good an argument as any verbal argument can be, even if only in a sketchy form. Then at 454a he warns us against the danger of confusing contention with ingenuous discussion. Many fall into the trap of this confusion by failing to make the necessary distinctions, taking words at their face value. This is indeed a warning that we need carefully to heed. The trouble is that despite all the efforts of the philosophers and logicians, we do not have and can never have valid rules for determining what distinctions are to be made in each specific case. Words, living words as distinct from dead symbols, cannot have fixed meanings. They mean what a user intends them to mean. To be properly understood, the party addressed must receive them with goodwill. A contentious party can derive a contradiction from any statement. Thus our academic journals are full of things like this: Professor X states that A is p. Professor Y objects that A must be understood as A1 and A1 is not-p. But if A1 (either X or Y now argues) is taken as A1a then it is still p. No, for A1a is really A1ab which is not-p. This is not a parody; this is truly the kind of stuff of which our academic journals are full. The pity is that our learned professors cannot draw the obvious conclusion: they are really ploughing the sand. Any meaningful statement is a creative expression that has in it as much falsehood as truth. A critic can show it in a better, a richer, perspective, but – except in a narrowly fixed context – it can neither be definitively proved nor disproved.

It has often been noted that Plato's arrangements for marriage and procreation (457b-466d) are full of problems and gaps. Cornford appends more footnotes to the passage 459c-461d than to any other passage of comparable length to deal with these difficulties and ambiguities. Plato with his mathematical mind could not have been blind to these. I think this clearly indicates that Plato was not serious

about these proposals; he did not have to be nice about the details because he was simply making a fable. Our veneration for Plato, even among those who are opposed to him in every way, causes us to take him too seriously even when he is most playful.

How can we understand Plato when he says that the rulers will have to use much lying and deceit for the benefit of the ruled? (459c-d.) Could he have meant his readers to believe that? Did he not know that a lie is only innocuous when it is openly avowed to be a lie as in a fairy-tale? And that when a lie is taken for truth it necessarily vitiates the soul? Unless in his city only the rulers were to be rational beings and all the rest mindless automata, Cartesian animals, it is difficult to see how he could reconcile his proposals with his own views on what is good and what is bad. Was it the case that, as we find among us very intelligent people who, under the sway of religious beliefs, can affirm the most absurd and most atrocious things with complete equanimity, so Plato, under the influence of his political or class prejudices, could sometimes be equally blind? Or was it that, since the whole constitution of the model city was no more than a confessed fiction, he could permit himself such aberrations, just as a novelist can slaughter his fictitious victims without compunction? My remarks on this point extend naturally to all the conjugal arrangements and the arrangements and rules for the rearing of children.

The conduct of war

Plato in making rules for the conduct of war (466d-471c) extends the idea of a common humanity to all Greeks and stops there. Before vaunting of our superiority to Plato, let us remember that while in theory we have advanced to the point where we commonly pay lip-service to the idea of a common humanity, in practice our governments and the vast masses of our peoples everywhere fall far short of the ideal. This is another area where ideas make all the difference, and surely the more enlightened among us (alas, how few they are!) have a duty to do all they can, every one in her or his field, to make us feel that the millions who die of curable diseases and of hunger and want of water and in strife fuelled by ignorance and superstition, are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood.

All that can be said about Plato's position on slavery and on the distinction between the Hellenes and the Barbarians (469b-471b) has been said often and well. As this also does not lie within the topic of my essay, I content myself with saying that we should find here a

model lesson about how our conceptions, ideas we inherit or receive from whatever source, determine our understanding, our attitudes, and our behaviour. That is what I mean when I repeat time and again (*Let Us Philosophize*, *passim*) that, as humans, we necessarily live in worlds of our own making, and that we have constantly, tirelessly, to examine these ideal worlds of ours lest by forgetfulness, instead of being their creators, we become their slaves. That is the proper work of philosophy.

Recapitulation

At this point Plato leads us to a dazzling vista. Before going forward let us look back at the ground we have covered so far. The *Republic* begins as a quest for the nature of justice. It first proceeds in the familiar manner of the early elenctic dialogues to find various proposed definitions inadequate. Thrasymachus then turns the tables on conventional values, affirming that justice is a fraud practised by the powerful on the powerless to make the latter serve the interests of the former. He thus effectively changes the object of the initial quest. The question no longer is, What is justice?, but, Is justice beneficial to the just person? After some theoretical moves to show that the position of Thrasymachus is untenable, which leave Thrasymachus unconvinced, 'Socrates' suggests that, to attain the end of our twofold quest, it might help if we look at justice modelled in something larger than a human being. No one of his audience raises the question how we can build a model of something we don't already know. So we go on building our imaginary city, founding it on the principle that every member – individual or class – should attend solely and only to the work appointed to that member. Then we come upon the question, Granted that this city of ours is the best and that it incarnates our chosen conception of justice, is it practicable? By what means can it be realized in human society? Plato's treatment of this question, I maintain, is not restricted in relevance to the possibility of realizing the particular imaginary city described in the *Republic*, but addresses the fundamental problem of the necessary conditions of goodness in human life — and those conditions boil down to one: *phronêsis*, which is our only good, our whole good, and all the good we can find or think of.

The philosopher

We now come to the section beginning at 472a in Book V and extending to the end of Book VII, which I regard as the heart of the *Republic*, and the heart of Platonism, and, I do not hesitate to say, the heart of all philosophy. I have examined this part in ch. 6, "Knowledge and Reality". I hope that what follows will be seen not as a revised version of the earlier essay or a supplement to it, but as a parallel treatment of the same material. Together, they should complete each other; sometimes naturally there will be repetition and sometimes there may be some seeming contradiction. This does not bother me; I would rather contradict myself than be prisoner to a fossilized point of view. A thinker who does not now and then contradict her/himself had better go dig her/his own grave.

(The customary reference to the central part of the *Republic* as Books V-VII is misleading. It is well known that the division of the *Republic* into ten Books is an editorial contingency, and the earlier part of Book V belongs structurally to what precedes it, while from 472a in Book V, through Book VI, to the end of Book VII at 541b, we have one cohesive section.)

Plato raises the question about the possibility of the ideal state ever coming into being in our actual world (471c-474b), and gives his famous answer, repeated several times in the *Republic* (at 473d, 487e, 499b, 501e) and reiterated in much the same words in Epistle VII, 326a-b, that the human race will never be relieved of its ills until either those who philosophize truly and genuinely accede to political authority or some of those who hold power in cities, by some divine grace, philosophize truly. There can be no doubt that this was a firm conviction of Plato's. But this should not be tied up with the idea of the model state described in the *Republic*. The two have to be separated. On the one hand, that human society can only be healthy and happy when governed with wisdom – insight into true values – is axiomatic for both Socrates and Plato. That Plato has to exert himself to put the idea through is only due to the imbecility of the common run of humankind, against which all reasonable humans are still fighting a losing war. Truly, Schiller spoke with insight when he said that against stupidity even the gods struggle in vain. On the other hand, the model state of the *Republic* is intended simply as a figurative illustration of justice. And perhaps I may be forgiven if I repeat once again that when I assert that the *Republic* is not primarily a political treatise and that its

significance for us does not lie principally in that area, I am not denying that politics was a lifelong concern of Plato's.

Glaucon has demanded that they be shown how it may be possible to realize the ideal. 'Socrates' then first reminds him that they had sought the ideal as a model so that, having seen what justice and injustice are like in themselves, and what sort of life goes with them, we may know that such would be the life of the just or unjust person. We were not trying to show that such an ideal is possible of realization in its entirety and perfection (472a-e). Why does Plato lay such stress on this point? Does this not suggest that, though we should be absolutely certain of an ideal, when it comes to the means for its fulfilment we can have no such certainty? Is this not the case with us today? We may know fairly well what we want our children to be like; we may know what we want our society to be like, but what manner of education would give our children the character we want for them? — what laws and what institutions would give our society the character we desire? — there we necessarily fumble and err, often err disastrously. All the more reason why we should always, insistently and persistently, keep our ideals before our eyes.

Before going on to explain how we may hope to realize our ideal city, Plato advances another reservation. Practice never comes up to theory; there is necessarily always a gap (473a). This is in agreement with Platonic metaphysics. The actual is never fully equal to the ideal. All actuality involves a twofold imperfection, firstly, as being mutable and transient, and secondly as being an abstracted – and so falsified – fragment from the totality of the actual world. In saying this I may have gone a little beyond Plato in the second point, but still I believe it is in accord with his principles and is implicit in the Socratic elenchus.

Then comes what is perhaps Plato's most widely-known dictum, which is first given at 473c-e and reiterated several times in what follows with only slight variations in wording. Unless philosophers rule or established rulers become philosophers, there will be no rest for human society from its present evils. Did Plato really believe that this condition was sufficient to ensure the realization of a good state? It would seem so, or at least he did not see how else we might achieve that goal. Socrates on the other hand does not seem to have concerned himself with the question in this form. His efforts were directed to enlightening the individual person. A good city is made up of good citizens, and a good citizen is one who has a firm grasp of true values, and the way to that is to know how to search one's soul, examine one's beliefs and evaluations to dispel false ones and confirm good ones. In the early dialogues it is more than once assumed or explicitly stated

that a good ruler is one that makes the citizens morally good (*edei de sophous poiein kai epistêmês metadidonai*, *Euthydemus*, 292b; this is also the tenor of *Gorgias*, 515a-d). In the end this is the only radical solution, not only because only through good citizens can we have a good society, but more importantly because the final end of a good society is the moral goodness of its citizens. But this is a long, long way: what should we do on the way to that goal or to help speed us to that goal? Plato had his say. Has anybody come up with anything better? The so-called 'paradox' of the *Republic* is a true corollary of the Socratic doctrine of the identity of virtue and wisdom — and 'wisdom' is the word, not knowledge, for Socrates distinguishes the understanding which constitutes virtue from the knowledge of the specialist.

At 474b-c begins in earnest that vital core which I have described as the heart of the *Republic*, of Platonism, and of all philosophy. To defend our proposal, 'Socrates' says, against those who find it ridiculous, we have to 'define', *diorisasthai* (= clarify, not: give a formal definition) what we mean by a philosopher. So the following discussion, which runs to the end of Book VII, is occasioned by the attempt to answer the question at hand. But the creative force in all reality is a wondrous thing! An oyster is irritated by a grain of sand; it seeks to isolate the intruder, and lo! you have a pearl! So here we have something that surpasses and is quite independent of the initial purpose it was intended to serve. We have the profoundest treatment of the nature and value of philosophical thinking. It is this that makes of the *Republic* the most important book in the whole history of philosophy. In the *Republic* the epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical dimensions of philosophical thought are unified in one organic whole.

Our first step in the characterization of the philosopher is to say that a philosopher is a lover of all knowledge. But we soon find that we have to qualify that. Not all that goes by the name of knowledge is grist for the philosopher's mill. We learn that a philosopher is not concerned with the multiple particular existents in the world, but with what is real (475e). (Plato here uses the term *alêtheia*, which is often translated 'truth'. I have already given my reasons for finding this misleading, and will generally render Plato's *alêtheia* by 'reality' in what follows.) What are these realities? They are the ideas that give those multiple existents their character, making them intelligible, and which can only be beheld in the mind and by the mind. In other words, a philosopher is concerned with the intelligible realm which Socrates distinguished from the perceptible world and thought it necessary for a human being to examine diligently and seek to understand.

At 476c we have the gist of the Allegory of the Cave with which Book VII opens; indeed we can say that here we have the whole of Plato's theory of knowledge encapsulated in 52 words. Those who know of many beautiful things but cannot entertain the idea of beauty as such, go through life not awake but dreaming. Here I have to stress that this does not mean that there can be knowledge of the many in the absence of the idea, if by knowledge we mean reflective awareness. We can have recognition of particular things on the animal level, but to name a thing is already to apply a general concept. In this sense, all who use a language are thinking conceptually. But for thinking on a higher plane we have to recognize the independence of the intelligible form of the perceptible instance. The intelligible form is the reality that the mind contemplates. But let us not interrupt the flow of Plato's exposition by trying to develop all of this at this point.

At 477a we have another one of Plato's oracular deliverances capturing in 12 words the principle of the identity of knowledge and reality, in anticipation of its fuller development in Book VI, leading to the idea of the form of the Good. What is fully real is fully knowable, what is not real is in no way knowable (*to men pantelôs on pantelôs gnôston, mê on de mêdamêi pantêi agnôston*). This, of course, had already been affirmed by Parmenides, but Plato's development of the principle is original and leads to far more fruitful results than the static One of Parmenides could yield.

But to what is in-between being and not-being, to what is imperfect, corresponds neither genuine knowledge nor utter absence of knowledge, but an inferior kind of knowledge, which we may call opinion. So we see that in 476c-477b Plato gives an abstract of the doctrine he is about to develop in the following 70-odd pages.

Here I have to point out that just as I do not generally translate *alêtheia* by 'truth' but by 'reality', so I do not render *to on* and its derivatives by existence and its derivatives. In Plato *alêtheia*, *to on*, *ousia*, all relate to intelligible reality, not to actual existents in the world of multiplicity and mutability. I reserve the term 'existence' for this latter realm, and oppose it to the term 'reality'. My terminology has been objected to by some. My choice of terms may or may not have been a happy one, but the radical distinction between the two realms is necessary for any Platonic philosophy, and I see no reason why I may not use any terms I choose to, provided I make clear what I mean by each term and observe a reasonable measure of consistency in my use of such terms. (See *Let Us Philosophize*, especially Book Two; also "On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine's 'On What There Is'".) (My

use of the term 'existence' possibly jars with the Existentialist use of the term. This is unfortunate, but I cannot help it.)

At 477c Plato introduces the notion of a faculty and then goes on to great lengths to establish clearly the distinction between knowledge and opinion, because he finds the distinction necessary to develop his conception of the world – whose existence we cannot deny – as a region of imperfect being. This is a basic tenet for Platonism. But against Plato we may register the protest that the realm of intelligible reality – of spiritual reality, if you will – is, for us human beings, inseparable from the world of becoming in which we are rooted. Reality is not something we find either in the world or outside the world, but is something we put into the world, and in putting reality into the world we find our own reality. This is the function of philosophy, of poetry, and of art.

The passage in 479a where Plato states that of the multiple instances of the beautiful there is none that may not appear ugly, of the just that may not appear unjust, of the pious that may not appear impious (*toutôn gar dê ... tôn pollôn kalôn môn ti estin ho ouk aischron phanêsetai; kai tôn dikaiôn, ho ouk adikôn; kai tôn hosiôn, ho ouk anosion;*) — this passage has often been discussed as an argument for the separateness of the intelligible forms. To my mind, the drive of this passage is not to establish the separateness of the forms, but to reveal the imperfection of the world of multiplicity and mutability. The phrases 'appear ugly', 'appear unjust', 'appear impious', should not be given a narrowly epistemological import. The beautiful will appear ugly because under changed circumstances and from a changed perspective, it will have ugly aspects. Nothing in the world is immune to corruption. That is why it is judged relatively unreal, because of the essential relativity of its nature, as Bradley was to affirm, not because of the relativity of the point of view of the beholder. The worthy fellow who does not acknowledge the reality of the intelligible form but is riveted to the multiple particular existents is not being given a proof of the separateness of the intelligible form, but is being shown the superiority of the intelligible realm.

What can we mean by the objectivity of values, by the affirmation that there are absolute values? There is no single instance of a definitely formulated truth that cannot be falsified (I will defend this broad statement when we come to consider the nature of dialectic); there is no single instance of actualized goodness that is not tainted with imperfection; there is no single instance of actual beauty that cannot be marred. What then do we mean when we affirm that Truth, Goodness, Beauty, are absolute values? In my view, this should mean

that the ideas of these values in the intelligible realm are realities in the sense that they are particular modes of perfection, expressing the integrity of creative intelligence, the one reality and the one value we know in ourselves. I am not happy with this formulation, and I do not think that any formulation of this idea can be completely satisfactory, but I am convinced of the truth behind it. (I develop this further in "Must Values Be Objective?")

We conclude the first characterization of the philosopher, then, by affirming that a philosopher, lover of the intelligible, is a lover of what is real (480a).

We have said that the philosopher contemplates what is real and constant while the non-philosopher, when it comes to viewing reality, is blind. To rule our ideal city we need a philosopher who, when regulating the affairs of the city in respect of what is beautiful and just and good, has perfect models of these values to copy from (484a-d). All of this is of course rhetoric. Is it idle rhetoric? Only if we expected Plato to give us apodeictic demonstration, but not if we realized he was offering a prophetic vision.

We will choose philosophers, then, for our rulers, provided they are not lacking in experience of the actual world and in knowledge of the failings and moral illnesses of human beings. How are we to furnish them with this knowledge? (484d-485a.) But Plato does not proceed immediately to giving his answer to this question.

It is characteristic of a nature that is capable of becoming philosophical to be truthful, never willingly to accept what is false, but to hate it, and to love truth (485c). Here clearly 'truth' stands for what is real, and 'false' for what is wanting in reality. We have to keep this in mind if we are to reconcile what Plato says here with what he says of the ruler having to invent lies and myths for the benefit of the citizens. However Plato may have meant that proposal to be taken and whatever we think of it, it is not in direct contradiction to the requirement of truthfulness as the love of what is real as opposed to what is illusory.

The more a person's desires are inclined towards learning and wisdom, the more they are attached to the pleasures of the mind, the less is that person concerned with the pleasures of the body (485d-e). The emphasis put on this thought and the prominence given to it show Plato's Pythagorean inclinations and his personal temperament. Socrates saw nothing wrong with bodily pleasure as such. But it is true that the more a person is taken up with the pursuit of bodily pleasures (which, incidentally, the 'soul' and not the body enjoys), the less is s/he free to pursue the pure pleasures of the mind that are the prerogative, it seems, of a human being.

A philosophical nature will be free of all meanness, for that is inconsistent with a mind that aspires to comprehend things divine and human, whole and in their entirety (486a). Here we have another of Plato's inspired phrases that, for many lovers of philosophy at any rate, define the philosophical endeavour. But what should we mean by the desire to reach out for the whole of things divine and human in their entirety (*tou holou kai pantos aei eporexesthai theiou te kai anthrôpinou*)? It would be insane of anyone to dream of knowing all things in the world in their particularity; and to seek a general formula or theory encompassing the whole, as we do in scientific cosmology and physics, results in a high abstraction that may be pleasing to the mind and that may be very useful in giving us power to manipulate nature, but which makes of the world a mere shadow. Neither Newton nor Einstein could give us an intuition into what moves a single particle of matter. (Both of those great men were fully aware of that.) The philosopher finds the pattern, the idea, of the whole and entire and perfect in the integrity of the mind, in the reality of creative intelligence.

Plato certainly makes it seem that only the fewest of the few can taste of philosophy (486c-e). And to all appearances he was right. Are we to give up on Socrates' hope to make all people see the light? Must we be content with having, for all time, only a tiny minority of humanity endowed with understanding, leaving the bulk of humanity rotting in their ignorance? I think Socrates could not have reconciled himself to such a view; nor can I. Certainly, abstract theoretical thinking and the appreciation of abstruse philosophical reasoning is not for everyone, any more than musical or artistic creativity is within the reach of everyone. But this need not make us despair. For it is within the power of poetry, drama, fiction, film, music, and all forms of creative art, to make the highest ideals and values accessible to all humans of normal intelligence. This is the function of art and literature. Hitherto religions, in their positive aspects, have performed this function, but not without much admixture of evil. That is why we will always need philosophy with its dual activity: proclaiming the reality of ideals and values and unveiling the fictitious nature of the myths which necessarily clothe all determinate presentations of reality. When the dogmas of all the religions are clearly seen as myths, perhaps only a few of them will be found so horrid as to deserve no place in the common cultural heritage of humanity.

So under the guise of his philosopher, Plato has given us the portrait of an ideal character, endowed with all the time-honoured virtues. Such is the philosopher, he tells us, such is the happy person and the happy life, such is the nature we all have to emulate. And would we not

entrust our city to such persons once they are perfected by education and mature age? (487a.)

Here Adeimantus understandably objects that 'Socrates' has not been presenting an argument that would convince an opponent sufficiently skilled in the art of logical argumentation. Adeimantus further points out that the picture 'Socrates' has just drawn of the philosopher could be seen to be at variance with the specimens of 'philosophers' we encounter in the actual world. These fall into two classes: the majority are clever crooks and the few honest ones are simpletons who profit neither themselves nor society.

'Socrates' at once agrees that what is said of these philosophers is just. How then could he say that society will not be cured of its ills unless philosophers ruled? 'Socrates' says he will have to answer that question by a simile, and Adeimantus teasingly says, As if you do not habitually do that! Do I have to rub it in by saying that Adeimantus's remark was to the point? We need not stop long by the simile (487e-489c), even though it is as true of societies of our own day as it was of the societies of Plato's day. The gist of it is that in societies where the rulers are shortsighted and the citizens ignorant and unruly, it is no wonder that the genuine philosopher is not heeded.

So this explains why true philosophers are useless in our world. What about the many so-called philosophers? Plato first reminds us of what we have already said of the true philosopher, who is by nature a lover of reality (*alêtheia*) and follows her always and in every way. Then, instead of speaking about the impostor-philosopher, Plato surprises us by a flood of mystic light, a vision which, together with the vision of the form of the Good, comprehends the substance and the essence of all true philosophy. I have commented on this passage (490a-b) in *Let Us Philosophize* and in "Knowledge and Reality", and will not apologize for now attempting a new translation of this untranslatable passage and adding a few lines of comment.

Would we not be making a reasonable defence when we say that a true philosophical nature aspires to what IS, does not tarry by the many particulars that are thought to be, but goes forth with no blunting and no slackening of her desire, until she grasps the essence of every reality by that in her soul to which it is becoming – namely, what is akin – to grasp that, approaching and mingling with what has true being, gives birth to reason and reality; enjoys knowledge and true life and is nourished, and then has relief of her birth pangs, but not before then? (490a-b.)

In this breathtaking passage where Plato pictures what we may justly describe as the orgasmic experience of the philosopher as s/he soars towards and unites with Reality, the climax is reached in the words *alêthôs zôiê*, truly lives — true life, life in the fullest, truest sense, is the philosophical life, and it is a creative life, *gennêsas noun kai alêtheian*, giving birth to reason and reality: this is the gist of the *Republic*.

Philosophy is not knowledge of the ephemeral phenomena of the world of nature; nor is it a system of abstract notions, though it cannot do without those tools. Philosophy is the probing of the mind by the mind, discovering the realities created by the mind and the one reality that is the creative intelligence that brings forth those realities. And it is after the likeness of this one reality that we form the idea of ultimate Reality, which, to be intelligible, has to be intelligent and good — Plato's form of the Good.

We may marginally note that in introducing this picture, Plato says we may reasonably defend, *metriôs apologêsometha*, the conception of the philosopher we are advancing, not give a proof of it, which in fact is nowhere given, and could in the nature of things never be given.

Plato now turns his attention to the causes of the corruption of philosophy. First he reiterates that such endowments as we said are required in whomever is to become an accomplished philosopher are rare indeed. And the few in whom those endowments may be found are subjected to plentiful and powerful corrupting influences. The very qualities, physical and mental, that we found praiseworthy in a student of philosophy, can corrupt and can tear the student away from the study of philosophy. We all know that any growing thing, plant or animal, if it does not find the environment and nourishment appropriate to it, fails, and the more superior its original characteristics, the worse it fares. Similarly, the best-endowed natures, under the influence of bad education, turn out the most vicious (490e-491e).

Who are the corruptors of our promising youth? Not primarily the Sophists, ancient or modern, against whom the public cry out, but rather those members of the public themselves (492a-493d). It is the false values and maxims and practices diffused in society that infiltrate into the souls of our youth and corrupt them. The Sophists — whose role has accrued to our media — only serve the whims and desires of the public beast. Plato's denunciation of the common culture of his day is bitter and severe, but if he came among us today, in a human society that, by its hollow and perverted values, drives its youth to violence and drug-addiction and pornography, and wanted to revise what he then

wrote to make it apply to our present-day condition, I guess he would find his original version too mild.

Now Plato puts forward a question (493e-494a) which we might be inclined to pass by without much heed, but which is a question of vital significance, as Plato obviously thought it to be. Are people in general aware of the reality of, say, beauty, as distinct from the multiple perceptible instances of beauty? Do our academics, our professional philosophers, our teachers (in the broadest sense), admit the reality of such a thing? We have to be very clear as to what we mean by this question. The mere admission that of course we have the concepts of such universals, or even the belief in a 'Platonic' heaven where such ideas have an independent existence, is of no value. What we need is the realization that not what we see and touch and measure by our instruments is what is real: what is real are the intelligible ideas which give meaning to what we see and touch and measure. These ideas are the realities, and the realm of ideas is the realm of reality. Ideas are the medium in which alone actual existents have meaning and value. We as human beings live in a world made of ideas — this is what constitutes our proper human nature. And these ideas are the gift of intelligence. And that intelligence, the integrity and the wholesomeness of that intelligence, is what constitutes our dignity and our worth as human beings. That is what Socrates spent his whole life teaching. He spent his whole life trying to remove all that dimmed and befogged and falsified that *phronêsis* which is our all in all. Let me put it differently, even if this will take us farther away from Plato's language, though not, as I believe, from the essence of his thought: intelligible reality is a transcendent dimension of all being. When we denude actuality of the transcendent dimension of reality, we impoverish the world, superficialize life, and then truly all proves to be vanity of vanities.

The long passage in 495a-497c dealing with the estrangement of philosophy does not call for much comment. Where Plato speaks of the temptations and impediments placed before the would-be philosopher, we can imagine that he was recording his own personal experience. The bitter sarcasm which he levels at the impostors and usurpers of the role of true philosophy is as relevant to our contemporary situation as it was to his. On the positive side, I think the extent and the tone of this passage lend support to my view that the central theme of the *Republic* is the nature and value of the philosophical life, which is one with the virtuous life, one with the (potentially) happy life. (To be philosophical and to be virtuous is within our power, but it is only within our power to have the potentiality for happiness; the actuality of happiness

depends on things extraneous to ourselves. This the Stoics knew full well.)

Education of the philosopher

Now to the question, What city would be worthy of the philosopher? Is it the city we have been founding?, 'Socrates' replies that it is on the whole, except that we need to have within the city a mind or minds that, in maintaining the constitution and the laws, would have the same wisdom that we had in proposing them (497c-d). We are thus launched on the question of the education of the philosopher-ruler or rulers. Whatever the proposed ideal city may have meant for Plato, and whatever we may think, or whatever Socrates might have thought, of the monopoly of wisdom and understanding by a few, to me the significance and value of what follows resides in the characterization it gives of the nature of philosophical thinking and of the philosophical life.

The pursuit of philosophy should proceed in a manner contrary to that currently practised (497e). At present those who engage in philosophical study come to it as mere lads. They are immediately plunged into the most difficult part of philosophy, namely, reasoning (498a). (Plato here uses the expression *to peri tous logous*, which some translators render by 'dialectic'. Given Plato's fluctuating terminology, this is not serious; but since later on Plato deals specifically with dialectic, it is better to employ a different word here.) After a while they are seen as accomplished philosophers who need not busy themselves with the study any more.

In the passage where Plato says that the true philosopher, turning his mind towards the things that are – *tois ousi* –, has no time for the petty things of the world, but beholds eternal order (500b-c), the very tone and rhythm should convince us that for Plato true philosophy was a mystic experience. We cannot know reality unless we behold reality in ourselves, and we can only behold reality in ourselves when, like Socrates, we are convinced that our intellectual and moral integrity is our true worth and our whole reality. This is the reality out of which we lend reality to the things of the world. Plato at the beginning of this passage speaks of the true philosopher attending to *tois ousi*, the things that are, because only intelligible realities can be truthfully said to be, all actual existents in the world have being and permanence only for the mind and in the mind. A. N. Whitehead was right in saying that Plato by laying too much emphasis on the permanence and constancy of

realities left no room for process, except when Plato, like all profound thinkers, broke through the confines of his own system. (*Modes of Thought*, 1938, Lecture Five, "Forms of Process".) Whitehead was right, yet Plato was right to lay emphasis on the eternity of the real, but we should regard that eternity as attaching not to the ideas (forms), but to the intelligible realm, or more correctly to the creative intelligence which is the fount and abode of the intelligible realm, and it is not a static eternity or an eternity in the sense of an endless extension of time, but is transcendence of the mutable and the finite in the reality of the intelligible.

If the philosopher, being such as we have described, is somehow obliged to mould other individuals and society in general in conformity with his vision of reality, would he not be a good workman of reasonableness and justice and all popular virtue? (500d.) Here I think we can catch Plato at one of the contradictions into which the disparity of his thought and his personal temperament leads him. In the early dialogues we find it several times either explicitly stated or clearly implied that all that a good ruler can do is to make his citizens wise (for instance at *Euthydemus*, 292b and at *Gorgias*, 515a-d). This, I believe, is genuinely Socratic. In the *Republic* city the rulers make their citizens into specialized robots performing specific duties, and even in the present passage where we speak of the philosopher making the citizens virtuous, Plato cannot refrain from qualifying that virtue as *dêmotikê*.

What can a philosopher actually do for society? S/he can only do good as an educator, working for enlightenment and appreciation of true values. Only a society where true values are embraced with conviction and warmth, and not merely paid lip-service to, can be a good society. A presidium of philosophers at the head of such a society would have no advantage over a presidium of experts in agriculture, industry, health, and so on.

The philosopher, taking charge of a city to fashion it after the divine model, would treat the city and the citizens as a painter would his canvas and first wipe it clean (501a). This, we readily agree, is part, and a major part, of a philosopher's work: to wipe away false beliefs, misconceptions, and wrong values, and this is just what Socrates spent his life doing in his elenctic discourses. For with a wrong philosophy of life – and a human being if s/he is not degraded to a simply bestial life, must live according to some philosophy of life, explicit or implicit –, no organization and no system of laws can secure a good society.

Just marginally we may note that when Plato speaks at 501b of *to phusei dikaion* etc., *phusei* clearly means in reality, in the intelligible realm, not in 'nature' as commonly understood.

Having, to our satisfaction, convinced the many of the desirability of the rule of philosophers, we turn to the possibility of this taking place. Plato seems content to say that though it is very hard yet it is not impossible that, somewhere in the world, sometime in the infinite stretch of time, a child born to some ruler, endowed with a philosophical nature, may yet escape corruption, and in time hold the reins of state with wisdom (502a-b). So, it seems, Plato is mainly concerned to save the ideal. That the ideal should ever come to be realized in the actual world is left to divine providence. Who can blame him? We are in the same condition. Everyone of us can and must do her/his best to prepare the ground, but looking at our world today, who but a fool or a George W. Bush can be sanguine about the prospects?

Knowledge and Reality

At 502c-d we pick up at last the thread that we had earlier left hanging when we seemed set to enter on the question of the training and education of the philosopher-ruler at 497c-d. This question takes us to the heart of the Platonic doctrine of the unity of knowledge and reality. Just as, for Socrates, *phronêsis* and *aretê* are two aspects or dimensions of the same thing, so for Plato, *phronêsis* or *nous* and *to on* or *ousia* are aspects or dimensions of the same thing, and when we take into consideration that ultimately the Real is the Good, we can see that these views are not disparate but are in full unison. Here Plato was not revising but developing the Socratic position. This is the heart of Platonism, and it is set out in what follows of Book VI and in Book VII. It is to this doctrine that I devoted the earlier essay, "Knowledge and Reality". I hope that what follows will be a meaningful complement to what I said there.

So the rulers, having been selected and tested for constancy under the lure of pleasure and the stress of pain, are to be prepared for rule by making the foremost among them into accomplished philosophers. But we will naturally find few only that are fit for this advancement. The numerous traits we have asked for in the philosopher are rarely found together in the same individual; they are usually found separated (502e-503b). I feel that Socrates would have been very unhappy to hear this. Must wisdom always be the prerogative of a few? Socrates expected every normal person to be capable of seeing the light. Obviously the talent for abstract theoretical thinking is not to be found in everyone, any more than the talent for painting or for delicate manual operations. But the truths, or rather the realities, of the moral life are to be found

within us, and can be evoked by good example, by good art, by good literature, as well as by good philosophy. This is the wisdom of the *gnôthi sauton*. There is no guarantee that a graduate of Plato's Academy, if not influenced by the character of the Master, would be a good person. This said, I still insist that in Plato's account of the making of a philosopher we have the metaphysics of the moral life and the first principles of philosophy which we need to absorb and to diffuse throughout human society if, in the words of the *Republic*, there is to be an end to the ills of humanity. We have today a plethora of religions. They have, one and all, done much more evil than good. But we cannot simply dump them. That would not only leave us greatly impoverished, but, even though it would rid us of the conflicts stemming directly from religious intolerance, it would not help in removing other conflicts and problems. We need a philosophy that voices ultimate principles and values without being dogmatic because it confesses that all its formulations are necessarily defective and that its essence can only be conveyed in various mythical expressions. This, I believe, Platonism provides. And if what I say here sounds enigmatic, I hope it will be seen to be less so when taken with what follows and with what I have been saying elsewhere, particularly in *Let Us Philosophize*, "Philosophy as Prophecy", "On What Is Real", and in this book.

When 'Socrates' states that our ruler-candidates will have to be tested for their moral characteristics and for their capacity to endure strenuous study, and be trained in the greatest of studies, Adeimantus asks, What are these greatest of studies? (503e-504a.) In answer to this question Plato re-introduces the notion of the tripartite division of the soul. 'Socrates' begins, "You remember how ...", and Adeimantus emphatically replies, "If I did not remember that, I would have no right to hear what follows." Does that indicate that for Plato the doctrine of the tripartite division of the soul was basic for his account of the nature of philosophy and of reality? Surely the idea that *phronêsis* or *nous* is the distinctive mark and merit of a human being – which is genuinely Socratic –, is a corner-stone of Platonism. But I can detect no necessary connection between the philosophy of knowledge and of reality (I purposely avoid speaking of 'theory of knowledge' here) and the doctrine of the tripartite soul. Plato uses the analogy between the three-compartment soul and the three-class state to give an account of justice as a harmony pervading the whole. That is all. But I reserve any further comment on the tripartite soul for a separate study.

In Plato's tripartite division of the soul (mind), we have an instructive example of how a theoretical fragmentation of a whole into

distinct concepts, which can be very useful for a strictly defined purpose, can yet be very harmful when taken as representing objective fact and endowed with finality. All theoretical distinctions are fraught with this danger. We have to realize that all theoretical distinctions, all concepts, come with falsehood hidden behind their backs. For us not to fall victim to that falsehood, we have, whenever we welcome a concept and give her thanks for the good service she does for us, to ask her graciously to turn around and show us the falsehood inseparably planted into her back. That is the task of philosophy: to make us aware of the truth that no definite concept and no definite formulation of thought is absolute. Perhaps this is the principal lesson of the *Parmenides*.

'Socrates' now declares himself unhappy about his earlier account of justice and the other virtues (in 455ff. where he brought in the idea of the separate parts of the soul), even though his interlocutors were satisfied with that account. He says that in such matters an approximation to the truth is not good enough; we need a more precise explanation (504b-c). We had earlier opted for the curtailed course, but our guardians should follow the longer course or they will never attain that greatest and best of studies that we have alluded to (504c-d). Adeimantus wonders, Isn't the inquiry we have been pursuing, the search for justice and the other virtues, the greatest of all studies? Is there any study greater still?

The form of the Good

Adeimantus again persists, What is this greatest study?, and 'Socrates' teasingly replies, You have heard it often, but you simply want to bother me, for you have often heard that the idea of the Good is the greatest study (504e-505a). Yes, we, all of us, have all the time been saying that all that is done is done for the good and that without the good there is no good in anything; but these are banalities; now the Good takes quite a new meaning and a new profundity, and it is no wonder that 'Socrates' goes on to say that we do not know the Good sufficiently (505a). Indeed, as we will see in the sequel, after all that we have been saying about the greatest study and the study of the Good, there is in fact no science of the Good and no direct study of the Good. There is only a constant approach, a constant aspiring, to the Good. Our studies when properly pursued will lead us to where we can have a vision of the Good. And where do we behold that vision? Within ourselves. It is the selfsame vision that Socrates has been leading us to

discover in leading us to discover our inner reality and our proper worth in our active intelligence. And it is the selfsame vision that is given mystical expression in the mystic ascent described by Diotima in the *Symposium*. It is our inner reality, but in Plato's creative mind it has given birth to the idea of absolute Reality. Socrates believed in God as the principle of moral perfection; Plato created the God of metaphysical perfection.

The many say that the good is pleasure; these we can simply push aside, though here 'Socrates' deigns to argue them out; the better sort say that the good is *phronêsis* (we have to keep in mind Plato's loose use of terminology), but when asked, *phronêsis* of what?, they can only say, of the good (505b). Here we have to recall the standard proceeding of the Socratic elenchus: virtue is knowledge; knowledge of what?; of the good; what good? —and we find that nothing is good without knowledge, and though the elenchus formally ends in *aporia*, it prepares the mind for realizing that our proper good is in that mind that has been leading us round and round.

So when Plato says that those who identify the good with *phronêsis* cannot tell what that *phronêsis* is, but are forced to say it is *phronêsis* of the good, "which is laughable" (505b-c), we may ask: Did Plato mean that as a criticism of the Socratic elenchus? Or was that merely a literary trick to lead to an understanding of the true outcome of the elenchus? I say that the Socratic elenchus leads us to the insight that the good that transcends all particular goodness and all particular knowledge is that active *phronêsis* itself, in which creative intelligence and reality are one. The *Republic* tells us that the good which transcends all particular being, all particular goodness, and all particular knowledge, is the form of the Good, represented by the Sun in a simile.

Socrates sought an understanding of virtue – of individual virtues and of virtue as a whole – but he never claimed to have given or to be able to give a satisfactory account of that. His method and his purpose was to lead his interlocutors to realize that they have to find all that within their own mind, in that restless, active intelligence which makes of a human being a human being. Now Plato is seeking to ground that insight in a metaphysical vision. (Pardon the anachronism of my using the term metaphysical here). He is in fact doing nothing short of creating the idea of Reality as absolute perfection; not the perfection of logical necessity of the Parmenidean One; not the perfection of Anaximander's Boundless; not the perfection of the all-consuming Heraclitian Fire; but the Reality that was to find expression, with varying degrees of felicity, in Aristotle's First Cause, in the fumbings

of the Ontological Proof from Anselm to Descartes, in Leibniz' principle of sufficient reason, in Spinoza's Substance, in the Absolute of the German Idealists, and, if I may be forgiven the arrogance, in my Creative Eternity (*Let Us Philosophize*, Book Two, ch. 1). No philosophy can claim coherence without having at its foundation that idea of Reality as perfection. To leave that idea out is to rest with the infinite givennesses of the given world as final. And those who so rest speak of those givennesses as all the reality there is. If the reader should not allow that what I offer is an interpretation of Plato, I would say that what I offer is a creative development of Plato's philosophy in the same way as the philosophy of Plotinus was such a creative development.

After what Socrates has just been saying, Adeimantus' question in 506b, "But you, Socrates, what do you say the good is, is it knowledge or pleasure or something else? ", seems laughable, although it is formally admissible since Socrates has only been saying one party says this and another that. But in the architectonics of the *Republic*, this question introduces one of those interludes that Plato habitually employs in his drama to prepare for and highlight a phase or stage of the argument that is of particular importance. So here the temporary interruption in the flow of the main argument, strengthened by the re-entry of Glaucon, not only serves to throw the spotlight on what follows, but also to caution us not to expect a full theoretical account of the Good.

When 'Socrates' demurs and shows himself reluctant to go into the subject, Glaucon says they would be content with an account of the Good similar to that given of justice and the other virtues (506d). 'Socrates' says, Let us leave aside the question what the Good in itself is, but I am willing to tell you of a child of the Good that is very like it (506d-e). Why does Plato stop short of giving an account of the Good? Not because it would be difficult, but because it is impossible. Our knowledge of ultimate Reality cannot be encapsulated in a formula of words, in any determinate formulation of thought. This highest knowledge, the knowledge of the Good, cannot be communicated through any finished theoretical account. It is an experience to be attained in the process of searching for it by reason. A good theoretical account may be the occasion for a candid student to attain the vision of Reality; if it were not so, all philosophical literature would be without any justification. But the Reality not only cannot be exhausted by any formulated account, but the formulated account must also necessarily falsify the reality. That is why it must always be subjected to criticism. And that is what I mean by saying that all philosophical expression is

necessarily mythical. (See *Let Us Philosophize*, especially Book I, ch. 8, and "Philosophy as Prophecy".)

Before 'Socrates' gives his promised account of the child of the Good, he reminds his audience of what 'we have always been saying': there are on the one hand the many beautiful things and the many good things that we find in the world; and there is on the other hand against each class of the many one form; and while the many are perceptible, the one form is purely intelligible (507b). So, as we should have expected, all that we will be told about knowledge and reality and the good has for its foundation the good old Socratic distinction between the perceptible world and the intelligible realm, which is not a theory or a discovery, but the creation of an idea, the idea of that in us which is the matrix of an intelligible world in which we human beings have our true being. A. E. Taylor rightly states that "when the forms are mentioned in a Platonic dialogue, their reality is neither explained nor proved" (*Plato*, p.285). But this is not because, as Taylor supposes, members of the Socratic circle "know quite well what the theory means and will not dispute its truth", (after all, Plato was writing for an audience extending beyond that circle), but because the forms can neither be explained or proved nor do they need any explanation or proof. The form is the intelligible; its intelligibility is the self-evidence of its reality.

After establishing that there are many beautifuls and many goods on the one hand, and one beautiful-in-itself and one good-in-itself on the other hand, and that the one class is visible and the other class intelligible, 'Socrates' asks, With what do we see the visible?, and Glaucon answers, With sight. The obvious suggestion is that we 'see' the intelligible with intelligence. But instead of going directly to this simple analogy, Plato builds up an elaborate simile in which light and the source of light, the Sun, are what give the eye and sight the power to see and give the things seen the quality of visibility, corresponding to goodness and the source of goodness, the Good, which give to the mind and intelligence the power to understand and give to things understood the quality of intelligibility (507c-508c). Now 'Socrates' develops the analogy further: The eyes when they do not rest on that which receives colour from the light of day but on that which is enveloped in darkness, are blunted and appear to be almost blind, whereas when they are directed towards that on which the light of the sun shines, see clearly and are endowed with sight. Likewise the soul, when it rests on that on which the light of reality is shining, understands and has intelligence, while when it turns to that which is mixed with shadow, that which is subject to becoming and corruption,

has inconstant opinion and is dimmed and seems to be without reason. That which provides reality to the knower and to the things known is the form of the Good. It is the source of understanding and of reality, yet it is other than and fairer than these. And just as light and sight are akin to the sun but are not the sun, so also understanding and reality are akin to the Good but are not the Good; this is fairer and more worthy (508c-509c). Shall we say that just as Christians were to incarnate the Father in the Son, so Plato had incarnated the Good in the Sun? Would that Christians had confessed their incarnation was no more than a beautiful image!

So here we have in essence the doctrine of the unity of reality, goodness, and intelligence, from which follows the doctrine of the parallel gradations of reality and knowledge, depicted graphically in the simile of the divided line, and represented symbolically in the Allegory of the Cave. In other words, the simile of the sun, the doctrine of the divided line, and the allegory of the cave, are simply various expressions of the same insight, and I maintain that it is the same insight that Socrates gave us when he taught that the intelligible realm, which is bred in the mind and by the mind, is our whole reality and our whole worth.

Here is the whole of Platonism presented in a simile. There is no argument and no proof and no pretence of argument or proof, any more than there is in the parables of Jesus of Nazareth. The simile offers a vision, a pattern of ideas through which the whole of human experience and all the givennesses of the world receive intelligibility. This is the function and the power of philosophy, to give us understanding through oracular visions.

Shall we rest with an illusion?, you ask. It is an illusion which creates reality. It is not false, because it does not claim to report or represent anything objective. It gives us the power to be ourselves real. Its reality is the reality of our creative intelligence. And we are not deluded when we say, this is reality, and reality must be such or it means nothing to us. Those who think that we Platonists are dreaming, do so because they cannot free themselves from the clutches of the dogmatism that insists that the perceptible things of the mutable world are all the reality there is.

In 379a-b we had been told that poets must speak of God as he truly is, and that God is truly good. We may call this the fundamental myth of all philosophy. The philosopher identifies ultimate reality with perfection, primarily moral perfection, not because this is a fact for which s/he can find evidence or which s/he can deduce from any premisses, but because this is the idea of Reality which invests life with

meaning and value. Are we then deceiving ourselves? No. Like Kant in his more sanguine moments, I say that reason can discover no meaning or value in the actual world. When dealing with the 'outside' world reason can only give us phenomena, processes, and formulae, all perfectly sterilized. The Reality philosophy offers us is our reality, but it is also a Reality of which we can say, if the fount and origin and fundament of all things is to be intelligible, it must be such. That is why, though I maintain that all the reality we know is the reality of creative intelligence in ourselves, yet I do not think it unreasonable to say that if ultimate Reality is to be intelligible it must be ultimately good and intelligent. And with Keats I repeat,

— that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The divided line

The image of the divided line (509d-511e) is nothing but a graphic representation of the philosophy of knowledge and reality contained in the simile of the sun as imaging the Good. But here first we put together the simile and that which the simile stands for, and so we have a continuum with complete reality and complete intelligence and intelligibility at one end, shading off into lesser reality and intelligence and intelligibility. That is why in the image of the divided line we have one straight line, though it is divided in such a way that its two main parts stand respectively for the Father and the Son of the simile.

We thus have the representation of two worlds: the real and intelligible world with the Good as its apex and its source, and the less real and less knowable world which we know by our senses and which is an image and a reflection of the real world. The further division of the intelligible and the perceptible each into two subdivisions is *ad hoc*, for the whole is in fact a continuum. I will try not to comment in detail on what remains of Book VI, first, since I have dealt with it in ch. 6, "Knowledge and Reality", and, secondly, since the 'divided line' suffers no dearth of scholarly attention.

So we have the Good, king of the intelligible realm, and the Sun, king of the perceptible world. Let us represent the whole composed of these two worlds by a line divided into two unequal parts (509d). Let us note here that the inequality of divisions both in this primary division and in the secondary dual divisions does not represent any quantitative feature in reality but symbolizes the relative intrinsic worth of the

various divisions. It is symbolic of a ranking in order of reality and honour.

Let us further divide the two parts, the intelligible and the perceptible, each into two sections in the same manner and proportion. The divisions will represent to us the relative clearness or obscurity of the parts. So we have a gradation beginning, at the lowest end, with shadows and images, then, in the higher section of the lower division, we have the things of the world of which the shadows and images were reflections. We have ranged these sections in terms of their relative reality, but since we say that reality and knowledge are a unity, we find one section also representing the lowest degree of knowing, and the other section the relatively higher degree of knowledge of things perceptible which we may call belief or opinion. Then we move on to the intelligible division. Here also we have a lower section where the mind studies the things that formed the higher section of the lower division. Plato here employs the language of the method of hypotheses which he had introduced in the *Phaedo*. (See chapter 5, "The Meaning of the *Phaedo*", section headed "Hypotheses".) So in this lower section the mind deals with the forms of perceptible things and proceeds by means of hypotheses. In the higher section the mind deals with pure ideas and ends where hypotheses are discarded like Wittgenstein's ladder. And again, corresponding to the levels of knowledge we have levels of reality (509d-510b).

At this point Glaucon says he could not understand sufficiently what 'Socrates' has just been saying (510b), which is Plato's way of telling us that here is an important or original point he wants to develop, and in fact in 510c-511e Plato gives us a summary of his philosophy of knowledge.

Geometricians and arithmeticians, taking number and the geometrical figures and angles as hypothetically given, assuming they understand these, without in fact giving any account of them, proceed to derive certain conclusions. When they question their principles, it is – as Plato said in the *Phaedo* – to ground them in more general but still unquestioned principles (510c-d). When geometricians make use of drawn figures, they are not in fact reasoning about the actual figures before them, but about the forms these figures represent, which forms are only to be seen by the mind (510d-511a). In all science, though the immediate object of study is something actual, the theorizing and the knowledge gathered are always conceptual, for as 'Parmenides' said in the *Parmenides*, without the forms, there is no reasoning. Hence, we have taken this section as part of the intelligible division, but in this region the mind works in hypotheses, which it may subsume in higher

hypotheses, but never transcends completely (511a). In science we cannot eradicate the givenness of the given.

Had Plato known our modern 'exact' sciences, he would still have placed them no higher than the lower section of the higher division of the divided line; 'natural laws' and theories are concerned with the appearances and sequences of mutable things, and have nothing to do with meanings and values which are the domain of philosophy proper, which alone occupies the topmost section of the line. I have dealt with this point repeatedly in giving my interpretation of Socrates' 'autobiography' in the *Phaedo*.

In the higher part of the higher division the mind approaches principles through pure reason, employing hypotheses not as first principles but as stepping-stones, to reach the unhypothetical origin of all, and thence descending to what depends on that, making no use whatever of the perceptible, but purely of pure ideas, proceeding through ideas, and ending in ideas (511b-c).

While *dianoia* proceeds discursively, moving from a given postulate, premiss, hypothesis, to a conclusion – or from given evidence to a hypothesis or theory –, the characteristic of *noësis* is self-evidence; the intelligible warrants its own reality. This is the insight expressed by Socrates in his 'foolish' principle that the final explanation of all beauty is that it is by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. The creative idea of beauty is its own evidence and is what is real and in it all particular beautiful things obtain reality.

In the higher section of the higher division the mind works with pure ideas and ends in principles which are not hypothetical. This is the area of philosophy proper and dialectic. In what sense can we speak of the principles of philosophy as not hypothetical? I would say that the principles of philosophy have the self-evidence of reality. They reflect and express the reality of creative intelligence itself. But any determinate expression of that reality is necessarily imperfect and tinged with falsehood, because using concepts which, being determinate, fall short of full reality. Determinate thought can never exhaust the reality of creative intelligence. Hence the operation of dialectic is unending and the rationality of philosophy resides precisely in its ceaseless criticism of its own determinate formulations. Hence while all philosophy is oracular and all philosophical thought creative, imaginative, and mythical, yet a dogmatic philosophy, a philosophy that vaunts its own finality, is a contradiction in terms and a sham. It turns into a superstition.

This is Plato's philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of reality in one. There is a gradation of reality from the transient givennesses of

experience to the eternal reality of creative intelligence, with corresponding gradations of knowledge. We can have any number of rungs in the gradations, since in reality there is a continuum. Plato, keeping to his four divisions of the line simile, distinguishes four levels of being and four levels of knowledge, but he does not keep to a hard and fast terminology, and translators of Plato do not all use the same English words for Plato's terms. No importance attaches to the vocabulary adopted, but we should be clear about the distinctions made.

We may say that, on the dimension of reality, we have the highest reality and the forms, those together constituting the intelligible realm, then things in the world and images of those things, constituting the perceptible world. On the dimension of knowledge, we have understanding and reason, forming the domain of intelligence, then thought and belief, forming the domain of opinion.

Allegory of the Cave

In ch. 6, "Knowledge and Reality" I did not comment on the Allegory of the Cave at the beginning of Book VII on the ground that it simply represents allegorically what has already been presented explicitly in Book VI. The allegory is deservedly well-known so that there is no need for me to repeat it here. I will only give the gist of the allegory, briefly and without reproducing the elaborate details of Plato's image.

As long as we live in the natural world and are obliged to perceive all things through the senses, we live in a world of shadow of shadows. This assumes that the natural world is not fully real. There is no constancy and no clarity in the things of the world, and we do not find in them the reason of their own being. Their interpretation calls for something beyond them to explain their very being. Thus all becoming, all that is relative and finite, craves a constant Being to give it meaning. That is the need that all philosophers from Thales to Parmenides had sought to satisfy. Such is the world, and our senses do not even give us a faithful account of that imperfect reality of the world but confound it further with their own imperfections. So, confined to the senses, we are in the domain of the shadow of shadows within the cave (514a-515c).

When we make the effort to escape the cave, we begin to see, not the shadows of natural things, thrown by the artificial fire – the senses – , but the things themselves in the light of the sun. This is the level of conceptual knowledge, represented in the allegory by reflections in

water and other smooth surfaces. We can think about things and reason about them, but we are still living and moving in the world of things that are only real by sufferance. We have to move further still from the world of imperfect reality and borrowed being into the world of pure ideas to come in touch with a reality that has the self-evidence and sufficiency of true Being (515c-517a).

'Socrates' makes sure that the meaning of the allegory is not lost on his audience. The world we perceive with our senses corresponds to the dark cave, the upward journey from the cave into the sunlit region symbolizes entry into the intelligible sphere of the mind. Viewing the form of the Good comes only when the journey is accomplished. When the vision is attained we reason that this, the Good, is the origin of all that is right and fine, "generating in the visible world light and the lord of light, in the intelligible realm it itself is lord, the source of reality and intelligence" (517a-c). Here Plato uses the word *sullogistea*. It would not only be anachronistic to understand this in terms of Aristotle's syllogistic reasoning, but that would be wholly against the grain of Plato's thought. There is no logical inference either to or from the form of the Good. The idea of the Good, crowning and rewarding the mind's contemplation of its own reality, makes the phenomena of the world intelligible under the forms of beauty, justice, and the like.

It is not to be wondered at then that persons who have seen the light are loth to go back to the darkness of the cave or that, if obliged to do so, they would there show poorly when contesting with those habituated to the life of shadows (517c-e).

If what we have been saying is true, then education cannot be – as some suppose it to be – the putting into the mind of knowledge that was not there in the first place, as if we were to put sight into eyes that did not have the power to see (518b-c). True education proceeds by providing opportunity for the mind to exercise its own power and discover its proper treasures. In educational theory we have to a considerable extent come to absorb this great Socratic-Platonic insight. But the significance of this insight for the theory of knowledge has yet to be fully absorbed. Empirical data – the 'objective facts' that many of our academics idolize – bring no knowledge with them into the mind. It is the creative power of the mind that gives the data and the facts their meaning and their value and makes them intelligible by the forms and patterns, concepts and theories, equations and ideal fictions, it spreads over them.

Now 'Socrates' gives the image of the eye and sight a most significant elaboration. As if the eye could not see unless the whole body turned away from the shadowy sphere towards that on which the

light shone, so the soul as a whole has to turn away from the region of becoming, to behold reality, and the most luminous form of reality, the Good (518c-d). This is metaphysics, philosophy of knowledge, and moral philosophy all in one, as all genuine philosophy has to be. It is only when inspired by the idea of perfect Reality, which is intelligence and goodness in one, that we obtain reality ourselves, and have understanding, and are morally good.

The education we need then is one that leads the soul to behold its own inner reality by turning away from the things that distract it and cloud its vision (518d).

True virtue comes from our inborn intelligence when turned in the right direction. Clever but vicious persons are a product of misdirected intelligence. The common so-called virtues are a matter of habit and practice; they are useful for the maintenance of society, but are not of much intrinsic value (518d-519a).

For the government of our city we can rely neither on rulers ignorant of reality and true values nor on philosophers who are unwilling to part from their celestial regions and take part in the humdrum affairs of society (519b-c). We have to see to it that the best-endowed of our young people are given the education that leads them to know the Good, but then not to allow them to rest there, but induce them to go down to those confined within the cave and assume their share in the life of the common people (519c-d).

Glaucon retorts: Shall we do them injustice and oblige them to lead an inferior life when it is in their power to live a better life? (159d.) This raises a fundamental moral issue, one to which, I believe, the Socrates of the *Apology* had a profounder answer than the one Plato makes him give in the *Republic*. Does a good person have a duty towards her/him/self only or in the first place, or towards all human beings (or rather towards all living things)? Is it the end of a rational being to make her/him/self happy or to make all creatures capable of happiness happy? In the *Apology* Socrates declares it to be his mission to exhort all people – citizens and foreigners – to virtue, without which there can be no true happiness. He declares it to be his mission — a mission laid down on him, not by any external authority, but by his own conception of his own proper perfection as a human being. If the formula that the mission was given him by God should be thought to contradict this, we should remember the lesson of the *Euthyphro*: what is good is not good because God decrees it but God decrees it because it is good. It is the inner monitor within each of us that tells us where our proper perfection lies. A good person does not need any coercion to make her/him do what they can to make others happy even at the cost

of their own happiness. The Socratic principle, it is better to suffer harm than to inflict harm, is in full harmony with this stand.

But let us now get back to the answer 'Socrates' gives in the *Republic*. 'Socrates' reminds Glaucon of what has been said earlier in answer to a similar objection. It is not our concern as legislators for our city to make any one individual or group happy, but to create such a harmony in the whole, in which individuals make what contributions they are fit to make for the well-being of the whole (519e-520a). Besides, we will not actually be wronging our philosophers by imposing on them the duty of serving the city. While philosophers in other cities are responsible for their own education, in our city we rear them and educate them and train them to be better judges of what is fine and just and good. It is therefore only fair that they should serve their fellow citizens (520a-d).

Higher education

At last we revert to the question we have been alluding to then putting aside for so long: How are we to bring such accomplished natures into the light? What is the programme of study which will lead the soul from the gloom of half-truths and pseudo-being in which we are commonly shrouded to the bright light of philosophy? (521c.)

The details of the curriculum proposed are perhaps of more historical than philosophical interest. I will only dwell on a point when I find it philosophically significant.

Let us consider then what study has the power to lead the student to the light of the Good. What study can draw the soul from the world of becoming to true Being? (521c-d.)

We have already arranged for our young people's elementary education through gymnastics and 'music'. But gymnastics are for the body, and such 'music' as we have dealt with so far infuses harmony and rhythm in the soul, which are necessary if the soul is eventually to attain enlightenment, but which, by themselves, do not give the enlightenment we seek (521d-522b).

We need something to take us away from the particular and the immediately given towards generality and universality, and we find this first in arithmetic and calculation (522c). Here we begin to deal with concepts that have their being in the mind and that, though they apply to all things equally, are not tied down to particular instances.

In introducing the curriculum of studies for the Guardians, Plato, in obedience to the principle he had emphasized, namely, that education is

not the pumping into the mind of knowledge from outside it, but is the turning of the mind's eye to its own reality, prescribes that the studies we need are those which stimulate thought, and makes a distinction between things which stimulate thought and things which don't (523a-524d). Plato says that things which involve a contradiction stimulate thought while things which don't, don't. Why is it so? A finger is a thing we can see, touch, and handle in various ways. Its existence is presented (reported, evidenced, testified, whatever) to our mind by the senses. A large finger, a little finger, a white one, a black one, is just a finger, is just there and that's that. But the number – the idea that we have before us one or two or three fingers – and the quality of the finger or fingers being large or small, or white or black, is not 'there', is not reported to the mind from outside it, does not exist in the same way as the finger exists. The number and the quality are things of the mind. Three kittens huddled close to each other before me are, for immediate perception, that particular visual configuration. But the mind can think of them as one litter or one scenic configuration or as three individuals. In the conceptual domain we are freed from attachment to the phenomenally given and go to where the mind is at home with itself. When the mind attends to them it is looking within itself, it is studying its own reality. Plato chooses to say that they stimulate thought because they involve contradiction. They involve contradiction because all determinate ideas are essentially relative; all determinate ideas are what they are in virtue of not being what they are not. So it may be that Plato while writing this passage already had the *Parmenides* fermenting in his mind.

Arithmetic then is one study that we need. From the way Plato dwells on this point (523a-526c) and from the discussion of number here and in the *Phaedo*, we can see that for Plato's contemporaries arithmetic, as a serious study, was primarily concerned with the theory of number and that Plato was very much immersed in this.

We have decided on arithmetic as the first study in our advanced curriculum. What next? We take plane geometry, and 'Socrates' is careful to explain that, though the subjects we include may have considerable practical utility, it is not for that primarily that we take them up in our programme of study, but for helping us on the way towards beholding the form of the Good. A study that makes us look at true being helps in this direction, while one that keeps our attention fixed on becoming doesn't. Such study gives us knowledge of what always is, not of what becomes and perishes (526c-527c). What do we mean by saying that theoretical knowledge is knowledge of what always is, not of what is subject to becoming and corruption? Pure

ideas, as such, are supra-temporal and have their being in the intelligible realm and have true being in the reality of creative intelligence.

'Socrates' again reminds Glaucon that we are not pursuing our studies for any practical benefit that may accrue from them, but because in these studies there is something that works on the soul, cleansing and rekindling in it what the cares and pressures of our earthly life have tarnished and dimmed, for alone by a soul pure and with its inner holy fire unquenched can we behold Reality (527d-e).

We need not tarry long on the details of the rest of the programme of study, which are purely of historical interest, till we get to dialectic, which is of the utmost philosophical importance.

After plane geometry we have solid geometry and then astronomy. Plato wastes no opportunity to impress on us the importance of the distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible. When Glaucon says he will now heed Socrates' reproach to him for fixing on worldly benefits, and that he will now praise astronomy for making us look upwards to the sky and away from the earth (528e-529a), 'Socrates' mocks his puerile conception of what is higher and what is lower. Nothing makes the soul look upward but what has to do with real being and the invisible. Through the bodily senses we can have no true knowledge. Only through reason can we approach reality (529a-530a).

After astronomy we have the study of harmonics, and once again we are concerned with the rational study of the subject. We note that all the studies proposed so far are of a mathematical nature. But we now learn that all of these studies are only a prelude to that without which no philosophical study achieves its end, namely, dialectic (530c-531d).

Dialectic

What exactly is dialectic for Plato? Plato never tells us explicitly and clearly what he means by dialectic in the *Republic*, although he leaves us in no doubt that it is something of the utmost importance. (Elsewhere Plato uses the term differently; these different usages of the term 'dialectic' should not be confused.) 'Socrates' asks, Can those who are not capable of giving and receiving reason know anything of what we say it is necessary to know? (531e.) The phrase *didonai logon* which here clearly stands for dialectic, is one which occurs often in Plato, and again without our ever being told explicitly and plainly what is meant by it. So the answer to the question, what exactly is dialectic

for Plato?, is anybody's guess, and I make bold to give my guess, my interpretation, without apology.

The simplest answer that we have in Plato's own words is that dialectic is the employment of pure reason to attain the vision of Reality. As in the allegory of the cave the person ascending from the cave trained his sight first to look at actual animals (not merely their shadows), then at the stars, and finally at the sun, so likewise when a person tries, purely by dialectic, without any reliance on the senses, but purely by reason, to advance towards realities, and does not desist until he attains, by reason alone, the Good, he arrives at the perfection of the intelligible realm. That journey is what we call dialectic (532a-b). It is a journey that leads what is best in the soul to the vision of that which is the best of all realities (532c).

In what we have just been saying we have spoken in terms of the allegory of the cave. Now Plato makes Glaucon remark that it is hard to accept this and hard not to accept it (532d). Plato is in effect telling us that to probe the truth of what has thus been allegorically indicated, we have to think and to reflect. The allegory cannot deliver the truth on a platter; no definite formulation of thought can do that; to probe the truth we have ourselves to make the journey. Glaucon goes on to ask 'Socrates' to proceed to the theme of dialectic, explaining its nature, its power, its divisions, and its method, in the same way as he has been doing in dealing with the subjects that we said were the prelude to dialectic (532d-e).

But in response to this specific request, 'Socrates' is evasive and enigmatic. Glaucon would no longer be able to follow him, because we would not be looking at an image but at Reality, and 'Socrates' does not care to affirm that what he has to say would be true, but that there is some such Reality and that it is only by the power of dialectic that it can be beheld, that he strongly affirms (533a). Here we have to remind ourselves of what Plato tells us plainly in the *Phaedrus* (274b-278e) and again in the Seventh Epistle (341c-344a), namely that no definite formula of words can give adequate expression to the profoundest truths.

Yet dialectic is our only means for attaining the reality of all things. The practical arts of humankind have to do with opinions and desires and with things that become and perish. And even the sciences which we regarded as a prelude to dialectic and which, we admitted, in some way have to do with reality, in fact only dream about reality, and are not able to behold reality with waking eyes so long as they proceed from principles that remain unquestioned, and are not able to give account, *logon didonai*, of them (533b-c). To give account then of a

principle is to question its foundations. But if all formulations of language, and hence all determinate formulations of thought, are necessarily imperfect, where are we to find a first principle that is above questioning? And we are back at the great insight of the Socratic elenchus: the only unshakeable reality we ever meet with is this very ceaseless activity of questioning by our intelligence; the only reality we know is the reality of our intelligence. Plato speaks to us of Reality in parables and similes and myths, not because there is some arcane truth he is loth to divulge, but because there is no final, definitive truth to be conveyed, but only a profound reality that has to be experienced. And the bottom line of dialectic is that every truth, every determinate formulation of thought, must be questioned and shown to be defective, if we are to have access to Reality. And because we can only give expression to philosophical insight in imperfect formulations, all such formulations are, strictly speaking, myths.

Only dialectic does away with all presuppositions to rest on the first principle of all. And if we ask, what is that principle?, the only answer we can have is the answer already given in the *Symposium*: it is a vision that crowns the ascent of enlightenment. All the sciences we have considered before have their place in the lower section of the higher division of the divided line (533c-d). Only philosophy, the exercise of pure intelligence, pertains to the highest place, but then philosophy gives us no truth but only myths that afford us a peep into the realm of reality — the living, creative activity of our own minds.

As we have learnt from the simile of the divided line, the clarity and worth of our various kinds or degrees of knowledge go hand in hand with the levels of reality they are concerned with, ranging from belief and opinion about things that are mere shadows of reality to the highest intelligence of the Good. This highest intelligence is the area of dialectic. But while we are told that dialectic is the giving account, *logon didonai*, of reality, and that he who cannot *diorisasthai* — usually translated 'define' but which I take to be nothing but a variant to *didonai logon* — the Good, cannot be said to know the Good or any good, and while we are said to have thus placed dialectic as the coping-stone on top of all the sciences (533e-535a), in vain do we seek to find in the works of Plato anything more specific about dialectic than that it is the demolition of all presuppositions. I cannot accept the view — *pace* Szlezak — that the true nature of dialectic was an esoteric science reserved for Plato's inner circle. According to my interpretation, Plato's failure to give us a clear account of dialectic tells us that all philosophical expression is necessarily mythical and it is the duty of reason perpetually to demolish the myths, because it is only in that

critical exercise itself that we come in contact with reality in experiencing the reality of our own creative intelligence.

Programme of studies

The rest of Book VII is taken up with the distribution of these studies, selection of the persons to whom and specification of the ages at which these studies are to be given.

We note once again how narrowly restricted is the circle of persons who will be qualified for the highest study (535a-536b). In a way this is not surprising. We know that very few have the aptitude for abstract theoretical study. But must this mean that the understanding of realities and values, which is the gift of genuine philosophy, must remain the monopoly of a privileged few? Must the mass of humankind be left with no alternatives but either to wallow in dogmatic beliefs and superstitions or to lead a life which no ray of light penetrates? I think not. If philosophy is permitted its rightful place in society, then the understanding it generates can reach others who can, through poetry, story, drama, film, and music, make those realities and values reach everyone everywhere.

In a short sentence, Plato lays down an important philosophical principle: *ho men gar sunoptikos dialektikos, ho de mê ou* (537c). A philosopher is one that sees things as a whole. A philosopher will not rest content with a partial view, but will seek to see a thing in all its relatedness. And to see a thing in all its relatedness, a philosopher has to break down the conditions that constitute its specificity and its particularity. This is a theme I hope to develop when I come to consider the *Parmenides*.

From this point at 537c through the remaining few pages of Book VII, we find Plato several times using the terms *dialektikê* and *dialegesthai* in contexts where they can mean nothing other than philosophy and philosophical discussion in general. In vain do we seek to learn anything more specific about the nature of dialectic from these pages. What I have said before and what I may have yet to say about dialectic does not derive from these concluding pages of Book VII but from what was said earlier about philosophical method as the destruction of hypotheses.

Then Plato speaks of the plight philosophy finds itself in, the practices that parade themselves as philosophy and the animosity these create among decent people towards philosophy. We feel that Plato is thinking not only of second-rate sophists who claimed to teach various

parts of wisdom but also of such charlatans as Euthydemus and his brother Dionysodorus so farcically pictured in the *Euthydemus*. But when Plato goes on to explain the causes that led to that situation (537e-539d), he delivers a strong indictment of the whole Socratic procedure. When youths who have been brought up to honour traditional values find the foundations of those values shaken by philosophical discussion, they have nothing to hold on to and so give themselves up to wantonness and frivolity (538d-e). But in the speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* – which I think we can regard as quite realistic – Alcibiades does not blame his waywardness on Socrates' undermining of his beliefs in traditional values; on the contrary, Socrates makes him feel shame at his failings, but other values inculcated in him by society have the upper hand and lead him to persist in his wrong ways. So what are we to do? How can we escape the dangers involved in philosophical criticism? Shall we ban any approach to philosophy to those under thirty or under fifty and then only permit it to a select few? This, beside leaving the majority of human beings in the thralldom of irrational belief and superstition, does not guarantee that those few of the few to whom philosophy is allowed will take it in the right way. There is no escape. The only security from the dangers of little philosophical thinking, is to be found in having more and more philosophy. We have to habituate and encourage our children and youth to question everything. If they learn that their reason is their proper excellence, and if, by example and by good art, they learn to love and to sympathize with all living things, then they will have all the morality they will ever need.

At the age of thirty, students who have the right make-up, after completion of the studies that formed the prelude, are given five years of intensive study of dialectic. Did Plato actually have a fixed programme of study for the purpose? What knowledge would this study hand over to the student? Did students at the Academy have to wait until they had mastered the preliminary studies, or were they doing philosophy all the time? Aristotle joined the Academy when he was eighteen and continued until Plato's death, when he was thirty-eight. At what point, if ever, was he allowed to study dialectic? From Aristotle's works we cannot learn what this topmost study consisted in. My surmise is that there never was and never will be any such specialized body of knowledge, and that we have the whole truth in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* and in the simile of the Sun and the Good in the *Republic*: in sincerely, earnestly, and rationally seeking reality, we come to realize that the one reality we know is our own creative intelligence, and that we can only conceive of ultimate reality as such

an intelligence, creative and good, and that only by ourselves being intelligent and good can we attain reality in ourselves and rise above the illudiousness and transience of all objectively given existence.

Then we are told that those who have passed through all the stages of their training successfully, at last, after completing their fifteen years of public service, when they have turned fifty, are taken to where they are made to look with the eye of the soul at that which is the source of all light so that, having seen the Good, they may fashion their own lives and the life of society as a whole in its likeness. They spend the rest of their lives alternating between periods devoted to the contemplation of the Good and periods given to the direction of the affairs of society (540a-b). But were we not given to understand earlier that the vision of the Good would be the gift of the five-year study of dialectic between the ages of thirty and thirty-five? By what means are the fifty-year olds made to see the Good? We are not given a hint. Just as we were not given any details about that five-year study of dialectic, so here we are given nothing beyond the metaphor of looking with the eye of the soul at that which gives light and seeing the Good. Does this not tell us that Plato was not serious about any of those details and that from beginning to end the whole thing is pure allegory? Would this in any way detract from the vital insights it leads us to gain, insights that mould our very being and make us worthier creatures?

Book VII ends with both Socrates and Glaucon agreeing that they have completed the discussion of the subject they had set themselves – the examination of the nature of the just person and the just city – and that no more need be said (541b). I vote with that. The remaining three Books of the *Republic* are more like addenda than integral parts of the original plan. I consider my commentary on the *Republic* as basically complete. I do not expect to have much to say on Books VIII and IX, but Book X raises important issues that cannot be passed by in silence.

What argument has the *Republic* so far established? The *Republic* simply teaches that the good life, which is the same as the happy life, is the philosophical life; that the philosophical life is the life of reason which, not satisfied with the imperfect and the mutable, goes in quest of reality, and finds reality in the idea of the Good. Now I say that the Good is the perfection of being we know immediately in the integrity of the moral act, or, which is the same thing, in the integrity of creative intelligence. If you say that Plato did not say this and that it is something I impose on Plato's thought, I reply that I find this insight already implied in the Socratic elenchus.

The philosophy of the *Republic* is a development of the principles of Socratic philosophy. It is a development, not a renunciation. When we

probe to the heart of Plato's philosophy we find, pure and unalloyed, the insights that had inspired the whole of Socrates' life and thought.

Just and unjust lives

In Books VIII and IX, examining various types of political constitution, the ethical, psychological, and political aspects or dimensions of life are merged together. Each constitution described portrays a type of personal character and an order of moral life. While it is not possible to separate completely moral and political interests in the *Republic*, as it is not possible to separate them in our life, the moral interest remains always the more basic one. As A. E. Taylor puts it, "It should be obvious that the primary interest of these sketches is throughout ethical, not political." (*Plato*, p.295.)

Modern commentators habitually point out that Plato's criticism of democracy does not apply to representative democracy, which was not known in Plato's time. But is the difference between Athenian democracy and the modern version as radical as we would like to think? If representatives could always act according to their own lights, representative democracy would conceivably be a great deal better than direct (popular) democracy. But when the eyes of the elected representatives are always set on the next elections, the difference between the two modes dwindles to insignificance. Until we find ways and means for reducing the flaws of the electoral system, Plato's assessment of democracy remains true: it is the system that does least good and least harm (*Statesman*, 303a-b).

'Socrates' has described the best constitution and best personal character corresponding to it. He now proceeds to describe the inferior forms of constitution and the corresponding inferior forms of character. In doing so Plato blends politics and psychology, which make a natural blend since constitutions, as Plato puts it, do not grow out of trees or stones but out of the characters of human beings (544d).

In a series of imaginative scenarios, Plato describes various types of constitution and the individual characters corresponding to them. These are rich in political and psychological insight, but their contribution to the question with which the quest of the *Republic* started is only indirect. We see that the tyrannical nature and the tyrannical character are in reality wretched and miserable, and that the just life is the only choice open to an honourable person with any measure of self-respect. The subjects dealt with and the analyses presented are certainly relevant to the human situation today. If I refrain from making any

comments here, it is simply because I do not think I have anything worthwhile to add at this point.

In a long passage at 546a-547a, the Muses, in a grandiloquent speech, tell of the inevitable deterioration of the ideal society when the fanciful perfect numbers and periods governing generation are missed. Is this speech merely playful as Plato himself seems to hint? He clearly warns us that the Muses in giving this account would be teasing, treating us like children. The fantastic nature of the account is further evidenced by the fact that it assumes that timarchy comes from a corruption of the ideal society — a non-existent ideal society. Is the fanciful account borrowed from some mystery cult? Is it a parody on such mysteries? I leave the question to classicists. Meanwhile I take the passage as one of those light diversions Plato provides to prepare the reader for, or give the reader rest from, a passage calling for concentrated thinking.

(Was the passage about the good man's wife's complaints in 549c-e the source of all the gossip that later settled around Xanthippe, whether Plato had her in mind while writing this or not?)

Plato does not spare even Euripides. At 568a-b, anticipating his all-out onslaught on poetry at the beginning of Book X, Plato attributes to Euripides the assertion that despots are wise by association with the wise. When Plato quotes a poet out of context, he cannot be unaware of the falsification thus imposed on the original intention of the poet. But since such quotation out of context was common practice in his day, Plato must have felt that a poet may rightly be held responsible for the possible misunderstanding and consequent misuse of his words. Here once again we find Plato's extreme puritanism bearing the sour fruit of all extremism. In no walk of life is it safe to hold inexorably to fixed rules and maxims. Kant also erred when he thought that the categorical imperative could be translated into specific maxims invariably valid for actual situations. In action, in education, in every sphere of human activity, we must be prepared to accept risks if we are to escape the danger of being fossilized. I do not think the good-natured Socrates could be so ungenerous towards the good poets.

At 578e we are reminded by Plato that our inquiry is about the greatest of all things, the good and the bad life. That indeed is the true subject of the *Republic*.

What would a computer make of Plato's argument in 583b-597b purporting to demonstrate the superiority of the philosopher's pleasures? If the data fed into the computer are not rigged, it would fail to find any logical thread running through the successive propositions, though it might find in it a coherence analogous to the coherence of a

Mozart symphony. Plato does not offer us a conclusive demonstration but infuses into us a taste for – inspires us with a love for – the pleasures of reason.

In 585b-c we again have the affirmation of the identity of reality, knowledge, and truth — the principle that reality, knowledge and truth are aspects of the same thing. Again, there is no question of any proof — this is simply a creative affirmation, an oracular proclamation.

Plato calculates that the just person will live seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasantly than the unjust, and the unjust seven hundred and twenty-nine times more miserably than the just (587c). This is obviously playful and it should warn us that in Plato, apart from moral values, nothing should be taken quite seriously. Then Plato heaps image upon image to represent the bliss of the just and the misery of the unjust. Then at the close of Book IX Glaucon says that the ideal city we have established in words is not to be found anywhere on earth. 'Socrates' replies that perhaps it is to be found in heaven, as a model for whomever would see, and seeing, fashion her/him/self on it (592a-b). And that is the whole and final message of the *Republic*. From first to last it is a parable of the good life.

The quarrel between philosophy and poetry

Plato's attitude towards poetry and art in general is a riddle. By probing into historical circumstances we may be able to construct many plausible and interesting solutions, though we may never be certain that we have finally resolved the riddle. Anyway, this is a task for classical scholarship which I am not qualified to undertake. Apart from the remarks I made earlier about what Plato must have felt to be the grave dangers of the perverse theology disseminated by the poets, epic and tragic, I do not think that I have much of value to add on this question. (See, for example, my comments on 362d-367e, 371b-c, 379a.) In what follows therefore I will confine my comments to points that may be of philosophical relevance.

In 595a Plato proposes to justify the interdiction by reference to his theory of the tripartite division of the soul, but does not follow up his proposal immediately.

Wherein does the evil of the imitative arts reside? They tend to pollute the understanding of the audience, except for those among them who know the reality (595b). So the evil of the imitative arts resides, for Plato, in their turning our attention away from the real and directing it towards the unreal. And here, I think, we discover that what was

wrong with Plato's theory of art was bound with the main defect of his metaphysics. (In the *Sophist*, *Philebus*, and *Timaeus* he sought to remedy this defect. See the final three chapters of this book.) Plato's own greatest contribution to philosophical thinking was his proclamation of the idea of Reality as perfection (the form of the Good). But where do we find that Reality? For Plato Reality remained an Idea, to be conveyed only in myth and image and simile. He tried all his life to explicate the connection between the Real and the pseudo-reality of the actual world, but never found a satisfactory formula. Had he given more attention to the consideration that absolute Reality demands the existence of the imperfect, transient world, as that in which alone eternal Reality can have actual existence, he would have seen also that art, by giving the imperfect particular a finite perfection and wholeness, can lead us back from the imperfect to the perfection of Reality. So Plato's theory of imitation goes wrong because it stops short of completing the circle from the idea, which is a child of the mind, to the specific instances, which only have meaning in the idea, back to the wholeness of the idea and the integrity of the creative intelligence that gave birth to the idea.

Plato's greatest sin was the sin of separation. Socrates distinguished the intelligible and the perceptible. Without this distinction there can be no thought, no reasoning, no philosophy. Plato separated the idea and the thing in which the idea is exemplified. (This is not the *chôrismos* which Aristotle berates.) He separated soul from body; separated reason from emotion and sentiment and desire and appetite. He separated Reality from the actual world, and so left Reality without actual existence and left the world without reality. (I have to refer the reader here to my *Let Us Philosophize*, Book Two, especially ch. 2, "Dimensions of Reality".)

'Socrates' asks, What is the nature of imitation in general? (595c.) We begin then in our usual manner when we posit a single form whenever we apply one name to numerous things (596a). This sentence has often been adduced in support of the view that Plato had a theory of forms existing separately from the things in which the form is seen. I have elsewhere contested this view, maintaining that Plato never had a finished theory of the relation of the forms to the existent things. Yet here I have spoken of Plato's separation of the ideas from the things. This does not contradict my earlier position. The separation I speak of is purely negative; it consists in Plato's failure to find the connection between the realities which are the ideas and the actual existent things. All his attempts to find such a connection he himself found unsatisfactory. He knew that the separation cannot be final and

absolute. The connection could only be found in a unified world where the transient actuality is a necessary dimension of eternal Reality. This is the view I present in my doctrine of Creative Eternity. (See *Let Us Philosophize*, Book Two: Reality.)

'Socrates' continues: Let us say there are many beds and many tables; we have two forms, one form of bed and one form of table. The maker of beds, looking at the idea of the bed, makes beds; he does not make the idea of the bed (596a-b). The idea must be already there for the manufacturer to give it actuality in a particular bed or any number of beds. And what can be made can never be a reality but only a particular actuality.

Then 'Socrates' asks, What if someone could make not only all the things that specialized manufacturers make, but also all things in nature, lifeless and living? A painter, for example, can do that. But then we are told that a painter makes appearances and not the actual things (595b-c). But we are entitled to ask, Why may not the painter be looking at the idea in producing his actual particular images, in the same way as the craftsman, and even in the same way as the statesman and the educator look at the idea in fashioning their various products? Even one who holds a mirror – or, to modernize the image, a camera – and turns around with it may be capturing in a particular actuality a form of beauty beheld in her/his mind. Plato was not constrained by his philosophy to condemn all art as leading us away from reality. There was something else that prejudiced Plato against everything sensuous and bodily — that something may perhaps be found in an Orphic-Pythagorean influence that led him to regard everything corporeal as intrinsically corrupt.

The bed-maker we said does not make the idea of the bed; we also say that the idea of the bed is the reality; hence we say that the bed-maker does not make what is real but what is in the likeness of the real; nothing that is actual and particular can be fully real (597a). Here we have a profound metaphysical truth that can yet lead into much error. All Idealists and all Platonists agree that we can find reality only in the intelligible realm. All particular, actual things only have as much reality as they obtain intelligibility through the ideas engendered by the mind. But those realities of the intelligible realm, and that absolute Reality, have no actual existence except in the particular, the finite, the transient, in which the real is ephemerally incarnate. This is where I consider my position an original development of Platonism.

At 597b we are told that the idea of bed, which has being in the original scheme of things, *hē en tēi phusei ousa*, is the work of God. We had always been told that the forms are eternal, and the Demiurge

of the *Timaeus* makes natural things in the likeness of eternal forms. The idea is the intelligibility of the thing and cannot be made because it is never a particular actuality; its nature is to transcend all actuality. This, in my view, should tell us two things. First, that Plato always uses whatever language or imagery serves the purpose for the moment. Secondly – and this both explains and excuses Plato's insouciance –, language can never be adequate to philosophical insight. To glimpse reality we have to surface with the mind's eye above the ocean of words. If we wish to reconcile the two positions of Plato we might say that the God that can be credited with the making of forms is the mind, and the eternity of the forms is the supra-temporality of intelligibility.

Plato goes on to say that God was under necessity not to make more than one idea of a bed. Because if God were to make so much as two 'ideas' of bed, then we would have need for a third idea to be exemplified in the two (597c). This is the argument that is to reappear in the *Parmenides* and is to take various formulations, the most famous of which received the designation The Third Man.

An idea is necessarily unique. The reality of an idea is identical with the immediacy of its intelligibility. This is the final answer to the Third Man argument and to Russel's Paradox. Russell solved (or rather bypassed) the paradox by proposing Types that at a given level of reasoning had to be taken as self-evident. But Socrates had already given us the key to the riddle when he insisted that the one sufficient 'cause' with which a philosopher could rest content was revealed in the simple principle that it is by beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. I have dealt with this argument elsewhere, here I simply want to say that God could not make even one idea of a bed, because an idea made would be an actuality and not a reality. The reality of an idea is the self-evidence of a creation of the mind; that is why it does not need a further idea to give it intelligibility.

It is clear from Plato's tone in speaking of Pythagoras at 600b that Plato was not only greatly impressed, not to say influenced, by the Pythagorean movement, but also saw Pythagoras as a model whom he devoutly wished to emulate. The Academy was not just a place of learning, it was a way of life, and I reiterate that I think the main aim of the *Republic* was to portray a way of life, a vision of the good life.

We are told that a poet is an imitator of imitations of the abilities s/he represents *pantas tous poiêtikous mimêtas eidôlôn aretês einai*. A painter represents a shoemaker, about whose work the painter understands nothing, to viewers who themselves know nothing about the shoemaker's work, but are deluded by shapes and colours (600e-601a). It is a pity that Plato's utter contempt for the visible and the

palpable should have rendered him unable to realize that the ideal can only be actualized in the perceptible. This inability left his ideal realm pithless. Plato was indeed capable of seeing 'infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour', but he only took the ascending movement from the grain of sand to infinity and from the moment to eternity, but did not complete the cycle descending to see infinity actualized in the grain of sand and eternity in the ephemeral moment. If we do not make the descending movement we, as actual living beings, are cut off from the ideal realm; our ideals remain in heaven and do not walk on earth. Christianity was greatly enriched by being Platonized, but, being over-Platonized, it became other-worldly; it could transform individuals but it could not transform the world. That is why we are badly in need of a humanistic spirituality, neither imprisoned within the earthly – like most secular humanism –, nor floating, rootless, in a hermetically sealed celestial sphere.

There is no need to argue in detail against Plato's representation of art as deception. We all know that a painter can make us see a thing more distinctly than we can in immediate observation. The painter, far from giving us an illusion, restores the immediacy and spontaneity of the actual visual experience. The bed painted by the artist is truer to the-bed-I-see than the catalogue description of the same bed. Again, when Plato criticizes poets for representing things they do not understand, we know that a poet describing a chariot-race is depicting the impression, the emotion, the striving, not the technicalities of the race, and the poet gives us a better understanding of the situation than even the person undergoing the experience itself can give. These things are now common knowledge, and there are those who can explain them better than I could ever hope to do. But in justice to Plato we must remember that he was probably attacking erroneous notions that were prevalent in his society; it would seem that, popularly, the works of renowned poets were regarded as divinely inspired and as containing unquestionable truths about all things. This erroneous conception had of course to be corrected.

It sounds odd, but keeping in mind that ideas are really creations of the mind and are not quarried or fished out of a mine or sea somewhere out there, we should not be too harsh on Plato for his want of the notion of imagination. This miraculous idea perhaps first crystallized in the age of Romanticism. It is not easy to answer satisfactorily Plato's strictures on poets and artists as being imitators at the third remove from reality in the absence of the idea of imagination. In imagination we have a realm of reality independent of and superior to all actuality found in the 'outer world'. Plato's ideas (forms) were such a realm of

reality and may rightly be regarded as the first source of the idea of imagination. But as often happens with initiators, Plato did not fully compass the extent of his creation. He confined his ideas (forms) within a too-restricted conception of truth and reality. It is perhaps only in the Romantic movement that the conception of the ideal world, for which we are indebted to Plato, burst the shell within which Plato had confined it, and took flight. Had Plato allowed his conception of the world of ideas to develop, he would have seen that the world created by Homer was more real and more lasting than those formed by Lycurgus and Solon and the rest of them.

So the poet, picking up appearances, using the jargon of the various skills, moulds these words and phrases in meter and rhythm and diction, giving them a magical charm of their own. Bared of the musical colouring, the content is seen to be worthless (601a-b). Here I think we have a real problem, a serious challenge, that has to be met. Of course it has already been more than once answered and well-answered. But a real problem is valuable in as much as it is capable of giving rise to an infinite variety of creative resolutions. We all know that a poem, turned into prose, loses in value in proportion to its intrinsic value as poetry. This clearly undermines any presumed claim on the part of poetry to be a vehicle for conveying factual truth. This is all that Plato sees of the matter, and so far his objection is unanswerable. But what of that magical charm which resides in the music and the form of the poem? This, which Plato chooses to discount, is the whole value and the whole reality of the poem. The poet, taking worthless tinsels as material, works them creatively into a whole that is a thing of beauty, a particular realization of perfection. It is only when we realize that perfection, the Good, can only find expression, can only be actualized, in particular goods, that we can reconcile absolute Reality and the world of imperfection which actually exists. This was the step that Plato failed to take.

Plato next applies his theory of the levels of knowing – knowledge, belief, and illusion – to the user, maker, and imitator of a thing, to affirm once more that the imitator deals with illusion (601b-602b). I will only remark in passing that here we have a sample of how all theory – which can be valid and useful for its specific purpose and only for its specific purpose – can always be used to give a meretricious show of truth.

Plato's exaggerated mistrust of sensation (602c-d) also stems, I think, from Orphic denigration of the sensuous and distorts the Socratic distinction of the intelligible and the perceptible. For the middle-period Plato – before he came to temper his position in the *Theaetetus* – there

is no truth in sensation. Locke was to tell us that sensation is our only reliable source of information. Both positions are equally one-sided and defective. Sensation without ideal interpretation is blind; ideas apart from sensuous content are vacuous. When sight shows the same thing as larger or smaller according to whether I see it near at hand or from a distance, sight is not deceptive but is combining in the perception the sense of distance together with the sense of magnitude; delusion only comes in when I *judge* the thing to be of such a magnitude; it is a deception not of sight but of judgement. Berkeley accorded to sense-experience its rightful place and Kant reinstated the reciprocity of the ideal and the sensuous in empirical experience.

Plato then makes use of the contradictions in our perceptions and in our emotional stances to give support to his doctrine of the tripartite division of the soul. When our judgements conflict and when we experience strife within ourselves, the different judgements and the opposed strivings, Plato thinks, proceed from different parts of ourselves (602e-603d). Again I think what I take to be the original Socratic position is more reasonable. In the *Protagoras* the struggle to overcome the sway of immediate pleasure or pain does not turn on which part of the soul comes into play but on what ideas are brought to bear on the situation (*Protagoras*, 352a-360e). When I am impelled by a raw desire I am not acting with a distinct part of my soul but am moving on a certain plane of my being. When I fall from a height and break a leg, I am not acting with a part of my soul, but am subject to an event on the physical plane of my being; when I wince and convulse under the pain, I am 'behaving' on the physiological plane of my being; when I reflect that I should be thankful that it was my leg and not my neck that was broken, I am active on the thinking plane of my being. When I act virtuously or when I act vilely, I am bringing different ideas and values into play, and I can vacillate between virtue and vice because I have not fully succeeded in reconciling and streamlining the disparate judgements and values that I have received from diverse sources and influences, have not yet been able to make my mind sufficiently coherent. (See my "The Mystery and the Riddle: Reflections on the Problem of Evil".)

Plato finds fault with the empathy an epic or tragic poet induces in us for the suffering or the rejoicing of persons in the epic or play. He finds our approval of this contradicts our willing to adopt a more stoical stance when we ourselves undergo similar experiences (605c-e). But, firstly, broadening and deepening our sympathies is certainly part of the function of art, and, secondly, this is not in contradiction to our desire to be more self-controlled ourselves, for the more we understand the

emotions to which we may be subject, the more we can put them under control.

It is not to be denied nevertheless that much so-called art in our own time is pernicious. Moreover, we can understand Plato's reservations concerning Homer. Apart from the false theology which we have noted earlier (in commenting on 362d-367e, 371b-c, 379a above), the widespread uncritical adoption of the deeds and attitudes of the heroes and the gods as worthy of emulation was no doubt harmful in the absence of an enlightened moral philosophy that could boast the same ubiquity, acclaim, and respect. I do not think that any present-day human society either can do without some censorship of art or has succeeded in laying down coherent rational rules for such censorship. We have to work towards such rules by trial and error, and to do that safely and effectively, we have constantly to think and re-think the underlying principles. Moral philosophy and philosophy of art cannot be constituted and established once and for all: they must engage our thought ceaselessly if we are to maintain our humanity. Philosophizing is an enduring task of humanity.

Plato's words about the quarrel between philosophy and poetry quiver with the emotion of the true lover. Let me give him comfort: The quarrel between philosophy and poetry will be resolved when the philosopher confesses that s/he too deals in myths and when the poet admits that nothing in the world, not even beauty, can excuse any disregard for virtue, as Plato himself admonishes in 608b.

Immortality

In the opening scenes of the *Republic* we have heard old Cephalus saying that "when someone believes himself nearing the end, there enters into him a fear and an apprehension which were not there before. For the stories that are told about what takes place in Hades, that those who had committed wrong have to pay the penalty, which seemed laughable till then, begin to trouble his soul, for fear that they might be true" (330d-e). So it seems that in the fifth century BC those stories were much in the air in the Hellenic world. My conjecture – and it can be no more than conjecture – is that Socrates was not troubled by those considerations, but that Plato seems to have given them much thought.

Plato leads to the issue of the immortality of the soul by telling us that much is at stake in being good or bad and that there are greater rewards for virtue than we have considered so far (608b-c). From Plato's works it would seem that he did believe in an after-life. This

contrasts with the agnostic position ascribed to Socrates in the *Apology* (40c-d) which is probably true to the historical Socrates. In the *Phaedo* he offers four loose 'proofs' (or three, depending on how we choose to assemble them), none of which he claims to be conclusive. The arguments advanced in the following section of the *Republic* (608d-612a) are of the selfsame texture and nature. In the *Phaedrus* (245c-246a) and the *Laws* (893b-896d) Plato offers a more elegant proof, which has more of the look of a logical demonstration than the others, but which, in my view, simply gives expression to the conception of the eternity (supra-temporal reality) of the soul, and cannot – as nothing can – prove its continuity in time. The 'proof' we have here in the *Republic* rests on the ambiguity of the term 'soul'. For we can certainly say that evil destroys the soul as moral principle though not as principle of life. I wish only to remark in passing that when Plato is most intent on 'proving' a proposition he gives us least insight into reality and value. It is when he is imaginative, playful, or openly mythologizing, that he takes us to the heart of Reality. Thus in this section of the *Republic* where we have argument in the strict sense, the argument takes us nowhere and moreover does not contribute positively to the overall 'argument' of the *Republic*, least of all to the *Republic* regarded as a political treatise. Do I then deny the role of reason and rationality in philosophizing? Only if we restrict the meaning of reason and rationality to inferential reasoning and logical demonstration. Philosophy is the highest, purest, exercise of reason, in the sense of the quest for intelligibility. Rationality is then the coherence of outlook realized in the harmony of fundamental creative principles.

'Socrates' speaks of greater rewards reserved for virtue (608c). To my mind the historical Socrates was content with the greatest and all-sufficient reward he refers to in the *Crito*: If, when our body is diseased, we find life not worth living, would it be any more worthwhile when that in us which is maimed by injustice and benefited by justice is corrupted? (*Crito*, 47d-e.) Virtue is the health, the proper excellence of that in us in virtue of which we are human beings. I believe that that was the final position of Socrates, and I cannot see what need we have for anything beyond that.

"What can be great in a little time? ", asks 'Socrates' rhetorically (608c). It is such an irony that Plato, to whom we owe the fecund idea of eternity as supra-temporal ideal reality, could still confuse it with temporal continuity. We are creatures of time, finite, mutable, ephemeral. Were we only that, 'we' would be nothing but a succession of transient states of existence. We would have no identity, no unity, no reality. By the power of thought, by the power of ideas, we have forged

our unity, our identity, our reality. We have created the idea of Reality, perfection, eternity. In creating that idea we have transformed our experience of transient states of existence into an experience of eternity. In experiencing the passing moment under the form of eternity we transcend time and existence and obtain reality. That is what poetry, art, philosophy do for us. That is what Spinoza meant by understanding *sub specie aeternitatis*. But we cannot reach eternity or absolute Reality in any other way. We can only escape the limitations of time and finite existence by transcending them in the momentary eternity of the creative act — in the creation of imperfect perfection in beautiful deeds and beautiful works. If we escape those limitations absolutely, then we are no more. All this, I aver, is a development of Plato, a sprout of the seed that Plato sowed in the soil of the human soul.

Was Plato at 611a-612a working towards a doctrine of the immortality (survival) of the rational part alone of the soul, freed of all affinity and connection with the bodily and the earthly? But then that would hardly be a personal survival, but more like the Neoplatonist or Gnostic merging of the divine principle in the divine. I would have no quarrel with that position, our difference would be merely a difference of expression, of phraseology.

At 611b Plato tells us that we should not believe the soul in its truest nature, *têi alêthestatêi phusei*, is full of variety and heterogeneity and difference, because we cannot think of the non-visible (*aidon*) as composed of parts. Are we to say, then, that the division of the soul into distinct parts does not relate to the soul in its truest nature? Are the parts then not truly separate parts or is the soul in the strict sense to be identified with the rational 'part' only? I think this is another instance that shows we err when we try to confine Plato's thought within solidly fixed moulds. Plato was too great and too original to deny a fitting insight expression to save a theory however dear the theory might be to him.

So finally we get to the object we have been aiming at and working for all the time; we have seen that justice itself is best for the soul itself (612b). The foundation of the ideal city – whether in the structure of the *Republic* or in the actual world – is not itself the end; the end is the good life of the individual person.

Then, for good measure, we show (612c-613e) that, even in terms of worldly goods, 'honesty is the best policy', and our tale is not denied a fairy-tale ending.

At 611a we had a hint at the cyclical argument given in the *Phaedo* (70c-72e) and the doctrine of reincarnation. Now at 612e-613a we have an explicit reference to chastisement in this life for sins committed in

an earlier life. This is another confirmation of Pythagorean-Orphic influence. How seriously was Plato committed to this doctrine? Was he simply toying with the idea? Given his apparent belief in personal survival, it is reasonable to suppose that he thought there is probably some truth in the doctrine. Why has Christianity not adopted this element from Plato? That would have brought Christianity nearer to Buddhism and perhaps an amalgam would have emerged finer than either of the two creeds in separation.

Eschatology

Plato has given us four eschatologies; in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, and then the Myth of Er we have here in the final part of the *Republic*. In every case Plato has dubbed the tale a *muthos* and he warns us not to take the details too literally or too seriously. In view of this, that the four tales should differ in their matter is no wonder and is of no philosophical import. Yet the simple moral of the tale is in every case the same: virtue is rewarded and vice is penalized in the life to come. The penalty, however severe, is never the wrathful vengeance of an angry God, but the chastisement necessary for the betterment of the sinful soul. The end is always to cleanse the soul and lead it back to the pristine purity of its divine origin — something more sane and more salubrious than the eternal torment of a Christian or an Islamic hell. I feel that even where Plato refers to the possibility of there being certain incorrigible souls that cannot be redeemed, he is merely following his sources and would not wish us to take that as his final say. Anyway, a belief in everlasting damnation would be hard to justify metaphysically if the ultimate source of all being is good. To allow that some souls may remain for ever damned would imply that there is an evil element in the ultimate origin of things, a view which may have been accepted by certain of Plato's sources but which I do not find compatible with Plato's own outlook. (However, the whole question of the metaphysical status of evil in Plato's philosophy calls for further investigation.) Moreover, I think it is still legitimate to wonder whether Plato positively believed in personal survival or whether his true motive in advancing these tales was to give colour and emotional fervour to his advocacy of a good life which was worthwhile simply, as Socrates taught, because it is the health and proper excellence of the soul.

Perhaps the tone in which Plato makes Adeimantus at 362e-365a represent the teachings of Orphism and speak of the so-called rites of initiation should incline us to believe that Plato could have had little

respect for such teachings or for the mysteries with which they were bound. Does this not suggest that, for Plato, the myths of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, in which he makes use of material derived from these sources, were purely literary devices, intended simply to create an effect. The myth of the *Phaedrus* is in a different class and is, I believe, a creation of Plato's own.

Even if we think Plato's belief in the survival of the soul cannot be in doubt, the question of rewards and punishments after death as well as the idea of reincarnation could have been to him no more than intriguing speculations. Socrates, I believe, saw all such questions as falling outside the domain of philosophical thinking.

Appendix

NOTES ON CERTAIN POINTS IN CORNFORD'S AND LEE'S ANNOTATED TRANSLATIONS

A:

FRANCIS MACDONALD CORNFORD

The Republic of Plato translated with Introduction and Notes (London, 1941, 1945.) (Page references are to the OUP paperback 1973 reprint.)

There can be no doubt that political concerns were close to Plato's heart throughout his life. But in the *Republic* the political interest was not predominant. So when F. M. Cornford writes in the Introduction to his translation of the *Republic*, "Plato's thought, from first to last, was chiefly bent on the question how society could be reshaped so that man might realize the best that is in him", I might not care to contest that as a statement concerning Plato's standpoint, though I may question its emphasis; but when he continues, "This is, above all, the theme of his central work, the *Republic*" (p. xv), I see that as a distortion of true perspective. The dialogue begins as a quest for the true nature of *dikaïosunê*, a term which, to the Greeks, meant much more than 'justice'. As the subject of the *Republic* the term might be rendered by 'righteousness' or simply 'the moral life'. And in fact the whole of the *Republic* turns out to be a quest for the good life. Its final object is to offer a vision of the good life which, for Plato as for Socrates, was none other than the life of intelligence, the philosophical life. And though a good society is necessary if individuals are to live the good life without hindrance, yet the goodness is immediately and primarily in the

individual human beings and only in a secondary sense in the society. The constitution of the imaginary model city there depicted was not proposed as a workable constitution for Athens or for any other Greek city. It was what the *Republic* explicitly says it was, an illustration, a 'maquette' constructed for the sole purpose of enabling us to see human virtue and vice magnified and so made easier to observe.

In a footnote to 438a where Plato warns us not to be troubled by anyone saying that desire is always desire for good and so thirst, being a desire, must be desire for drink as a good, Cornford, supporting Plato's stand, says, "It is necessary to insist that we do experience blind cravings which can be isolated from any judgement about the goodness of their object" (p.134, n.2). But a blind craving isolated (not theoretically but actually) from any judgement would be a bodily condition or a bodily motion that is strictly amoral. It can only be of moral relevance when it involves a deliberate decision, Shall I drink or not? And then the decision would not involve an opposition of the mind to the desire, but a weighing by the mind of two goods seen as such by the mind. Again I find the Socratic analysis in the *Protagoras* (348c-360e) of mental or moral conflict of greater significance. Plato here is not necessarily rejecting or opposing that analysis. He is using an abstract theoretical distinction to establish a psychological theory which affords him a language – a universe of discourse – for giving expression to certain moral evaluations.

Cornford in a footnote to 352d writes, "The word translated 'function' is the common word for 'work.' Hence the need for illustration to confine it to the narrower sense of 'function,' here defined for the first time" (p.37, n.1). Again at 477b-c Cornford says in a footnote, "The Greek here uses only the common word for 'power' (*dynamis*), but Plato is defining the special sense we express by 'faculty'" (p.185, n.1). Does the word 'defining' do justice to what we have here? The word *ergon*, work, was in common use; in that sense the word-idea 'work' is already an abstract concept which we no doubt owe to some prehistoric genius. Plato here, in giving it a new specialized meaning, is not defining something that was already there – what could that be and where? –, but is creating a concept, under which phenomena which before had meaning in one orientation, now have meaning in a different orientation. That illustrates what I mean in saying that ideas are creations of the mind which give meaning to the givennesses of experience.

Cornford, having rendered the *gennaion pseudos*, 'noble lie', of 414b-c by "a single bold flight of invention", exerts himself to show that we have here no more than a "harmless allegory" comparable to "a

New Testament parable or the Pilgrim's Progress" (p.106, n.1). Yet the context clearly indicates a fiction that is to be passed for truth on the Guardians including, if possible, the Rulers. If we regard the whole of the *Republic* ideal city as itself a *gennaion pseudos*, then the *pseudos* within a *pseudos* – Plato's own Pilgrim's Progress – will give us less trouble. I was about to add that in fact the story itself, as given by Plato (414d-415d) is one that no one in his senses could believe anyone to believe, but then I remembered all the unbelievable nonsense believed by the believing flocks of all established religions.

In his prefatory note to 528e-530c introducing the study of astronomy, Cornford writes, "Some Pythagoreans called [astronomy] 'Sphaerics,' since it dealt with the motions of the heavenly bodies considered as perfect spheres moving in perfect circles: there was no question of physical forces causing the movements" (p.246). I will for once depart from my determination to keep clear of scientific questions simply to remark that this illustrates how readily the best-trained among modern minds will submit to (even outdated) scientific fictions. Does anybody know anything about "those physical forces causing the movements"? Can we not say that the Pythagorean position – despite its mystical attachment to perfect spheres and perfect circles, shared by Plato – was more truly Einsteinian than Newtonian?

B:

H. D. P. LEE, *The Republic* (1955, Penguin.)

Lee refers to dialectic as "comprising what we should to-day call logic and metaphysics." (Translator's Introduction, p.16.) I think of dialectic more as an approach rather than as a discipline with its particular subject-matter. True, Plato ranges it as the top subject in his graded curriculum of studies; but he does not tell us anything about the content of the study. I feel that, as in the Socratic elenchus, it is the procedure that is all-important. (Of course, neither 'logic' nor 'metaphysics' had yet been set apart as a separate study; but that is not my point in this note.) A little further on (p.33), Lee says that "'dialectic' simply means philosophy." Plato in fact sometimes uses the term in that wider sense, with reason, since philosophy is nothing but that endless probing.

Lee finds that the treatment of philosophy in the *Republic* "is always rather allusive." He thinks that "the *Republic* does not attempt to expound the Platonic philosophy in detail" (p.33). Plato never had a "Platonic philosophy" to be expounded "in detail". Philosophy for him was never a body of doctrine or a theoretical system to be expounded or

acquired. Philosophy was for Plato as for Socrates simply and exclusively to philosophize, to engage in the active exercise of reason. Nevertheless, Plato could never write anything about philosophy "allusively" for the simple reason that for a philosopher to state what he thinks philosophy is, or is about, or is for, is to reveal the basic principles of his philosophy. I find that we have in the *Republic* the most complete and profound revelation of Platonism.

Lee, commenting on the argument that rulers, as rulers, do not pursue their own interests (341c-347a), says, "The last argument is very theoretical and doubtfully valid, but by talking of rulers who cannot err Thrasyarchus has deserted his own would-be realism, and laid himself open to a purely theoretical refutation" (p.63). I prefer to view this argument not as a formal refutation of Thrasyarchus' position, but as the presentation of a conception opposed to that of Thrasyarchus — the conception of power as ideally power for the good. The more power is endowed with understanding, the more generous and outreaching it is. The pseudo-power of folly is selfish; the genuine power of understanding is selfless.

At 391e Lee translates *epedeixamen gar pou hoti ek theôn kaka gignesthai adunaton* as "for we have proved that no evil can originate with the gods." This shows how readily philosophers – including Plato who never cared much about strict terminology – use the language of proof. But what did Plato prove? He oracularly proclaimed that no evil can come from God since God is good. What proof do we have that God is good? We make God good because only thus do we find life worth living.

In a footnote to 379a Lee says, "Plato uses gods (plural) or god (singular) indifferently; when he uses god we must not interpret him in terms of monotheism" (p.116, n.2). For Plato, and probably for Socrates, gods, if they existed, were superior creatures (created beings). But above all gods there was for Plato, and also for Socrates, the idea of an eternal, good, and intelligent being or principle. Plato gives articulate expression to this idea in the conception of the form of the Good. It is the form of the Good which, in Plato, may be seen as corresponding to the monotheistic conception of God (if we can agree on what we understand by that), and so it is permissible to speak of Plato as a monotheist. And when Plato speaks of *theos* in the singular, he is more often than not thinking of this one supreme God, the principle and origin of all good. So here, within a few lines, we find him moving from the idea of gods to the idea of the highest Good: *oukoun agathos ho ge theos tōi ontī te kai lekteon houtō;* (379b.) So at 508b the Sun, clearly identified as a god, is the offspring of the Good,

the Good being the source of all being. (Whether the genesis of particular being from the reality of the Good was, for Plato, creation or emanation, and whether 'natural' existents come from the Good, are questions which it would be out of place to raise here. Perhaps Plato never made up his mind on these questions. In any case, if they are to be considered in relation to Plato's thought, then the proper place to do so would be in a study of the *Timaeus*.)

Lee, in agreement with Cornford, tries to defend Plato's Foundation Myth (414b-415c) on the ground that it is not a lie but a myth "accepted by all three classes, Guardians included" (p.156). I don't find this convincing. This myth is not supposed to be acknowledged as myth but to be accepted in all its particulars as factual. What is this but the 'lie in the soul' against which Plato has warned us so strenuously? Even if we suppose the Rulers to know it for what it is but to pass it on the rest of the society, that would not make it any less pernicious. We have either to say that Plato here is blind to his own principles or to say, as I do, that the whole thing is playful, that the foundation of the ideal city is meant to be taken as pure fantasy, and that the Foundation Myth, as a myth within a myth loses its sting.

In his prefatory note to the section dealing with the 'definition of the philosopher', Lee gives a long quotation from Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy*, a book for which I have a soft spot in my heart as it was one of the earliest books of philosophy I read as a boy. There Russell says, "Let us consider, say, such a notion as *justice*. If we ask ourselves what justice is, it is natural to proceed by considering this, that, and the other just act, with a view to discovering what they have in common. They must all, in some sense, partake of a common nature, which will be found in whatever is just and in nothing else. This common nature, in virtue of which they are all just, will be justice itself, the pure essence the admixture of which with facts of ordinary life produces the multiplicity of just acts." (I quote from Lee's note, p.235.) This view of the origination of ideas or forms, essentially Aristotelean and now – perhaps thanks largely to Russell – commonly accepted, has, I think, to be questioned. I would say that before seeking to discover what particular just acts have in common – simply to ask ourselves what justice is – we must have an idea of justice. So this search for what is common among particulars that share one name is not how we come by the idea, though it may be how we seek to clarify the idea when it has become befogged and confused. The ideas – as I believe Socrates saw – originate in the mind, are first born in the mind; they create and confer on existents (particular actualities) qualities which were not originally in those existents. There is no justice or

injustice among beasts, but there is justice and (alas! much) injustice among humans because we created the idea of justice. The stars are numerous but not numbered except for astronomers, thanks to some ancestor of ours who created the idea of number.

At 531e Lee translates *dounai te kai apodexasthai logon* by "argue logically". Plato uses *didonai logon* without ever giving it a precise definition. Sometimes it means no more than 'clarify', 'explain'; sometimes 'justify'. Sometimes Cornford's "give a rational account" would be the most reasonable rendering. But perhaps Lindsay's literal "give and receive reasons" best gives the sense of "engage in intelligent conversation" which I think is what we need here, provided we keep in mind that "intelligent conversation" for Plato can be nothing short of the examination of first principles and moral ideals. In any case, since Plato does not define the expression, we cannot be justified in reading into it anything beyond what we find in his practice. The *Republic* is his most perfect example of "giving reason", but where in the *Republic* does he "argue logically" except marginally?

At 611b Lee translates *hoti men toinun athanaton psuchê, kai ho arti logos kai hoi alloi anagkaseian an* by "Our recent argument, and the others, prove conclusively that the soul is immortal." In the *Phaedo* Plato neither claimed nor pretended that the arguments advanced were conclusive. Admittedly, even then, and presumably at this stage, Plato may have regarded the arguments as compelling, but isn't there some distance between 'compel' and 'prove conclusively'? I have here to make it clear that I am not questioning Professor Lee's translation as translation – I hope I am not that foolish – but as interpretation. My point is that modern philosophers use the language of "proof" too readily and then take it too seriously. I think this stands in the way of our recognizing the true nature of philosophical thinking.

PART THREE

ADVENTURES OF IDEAS

CHAPTER EIGHT

LYSIS AND PARMENIDES

EACH OF THE DIALOGUES of Plato is a self-contained piece of creative literature. But the philosophy in them is a single interlaced web. Though it is natural in referring to the work of Plato which extended over more than half a century to speak of early, middle, and late works, I believe that there is no break and no radical change at any point. The latest works have roots that draw sustenance from the earliest, and in the earliest there are buds and shoots that come to full flower in the latest. Thus, for instance, I find both the *Lysis* and the *Charmides* of great relevance to the *Parmenides*; the *Lysis* in relation to the basic intent and the *Charmides* in relation to the argument of the first part of the *Parmenides*.

I

Lysis

This is not intended as a full study of the *Lysis*. I have already commented briefly on the *Lysis* in chapter 3, "The Socratic Elenchus". Here I treat of aspects that relate to the *Parmenides*. This has no bearing on the question of the chronology of the dialogues. The *Lysis* is probably a very early dialogue while the *Parmenides* is a very late one. That I find between the lines of the *Lysis* problems that were to come into full light only in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* and *Timaeus* only means that those problems and thoughts were gestating in Plato's mind from a very early time, which is no wonder.

The subject of the *Lysis* is friendship, not as a moral principle but as a relationship. The model didactic discourse in the first part is not directly connected with the logical and metaphysical examination of relation in the second part. So the dialogue begins as yet another Socratic discourse, but Plato then wanders into regions of his own.

Even in my boyhood I found in the *Lysis* the best exemplification of the principle of the transience of all particular actuality. We proceed from the examination of relation to a view of the relativity of all particularity. Hence I think that in the *Lysis* we have the key to the understanding of the *Parmenides*.

Following the first didactic discourse with Lysis, the first inquiry into the meaning of friendship explores the ambiguities of the word *philos*. But this is not merely a cautionary discourse against linguistic obscurity — nothing in Plato or in philosophy is a 'mere'. The discovery of the inescapable fluidity of all language brings with it the suggestion that as all words, so also all things denoted by words, are never a fixed 'this' or 'that' but a nexus of relations spreading throughout all being. We may find the explicit expression of this insight developing and unfolding slowly through the dialogues, but I see it as an undercurrent running steadily from the elenctic discourses through the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, until it emerges in the expanses of the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus* — and even beyond that in Plotinus.

When I say that no word has a definitively fixed meaning, someone might counter by saying that the names of metals for instance, such as gold or iron, are free of ambiguity. My answer is that such words are not meanings but pointers. They only obtain borrowed meaning by reference to a specimen or actual context — a specimen or context which has all the fluidity and impermanence of all existent actuality. A general statement about gold or iron which has universal validity purchases that validity at the price of artificial abstraction.

The properly dialectical — in the stricter sense of the term — part of *Lysis* begins at 211d6. Leading up to the subject of the following discussion, Socrates says that the thing he had always wished for above all else was the possession of a friend. He goes on: Far from having this, I do not even know — but instead of saying, as in the properly elenctic discourses: I do not even know what friendship is or what a friend is, he says: I do not even know in what way one friend becomes friend to another (211d-212a). Plato clearly means to raise a problem essentially different from the problem raised in *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, or *Republic* I. The discussion following suggests, and, I believe, is meant to suggest, the principle that is given explicit expression in the *Sophist*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Philebus*: Nothing ever is in itself just what it is in itself: everything has its true being and its true meaning in its interrelatedness with everything else, with all that is. This is the principle underlying the dictum: *ho men gar sunoptikos dialektikos, ho de mê ou* (*Republic*, 537c), he who sees things as a

whole is philosophical, he who doesn't, isn't. This is also the underlying lesson of the *Parmenides*, the metaphysical dimension of the *Parmenides*.

Plato probably was also simultaneously thinking of the logical problem of relations and relative terms. But I think the metaphysical dimension and the metaphysical insight are more fundamental both in the *Lysis* and in the *Parmenides*.

Here as elsewhere, mixed with the dialectical (logical and metaphysical) issues are the linguistic ambiguities. In all of Socrates' discourses, he lays linguistic ambiguities bare to help clearer thinking. So here also there is a good measure of the customary Socratic disentanglement of tangles and illumination of obscurities. Sometimes, as in the *Lysis*, the linguistic ambiguities are compounded by peculiarities of the Greek idiom. In all languages there are such peculiarities of idiom, and in all there is the risk of careless usage that leads to obscurities and misjudgements. But the clearing away of such special complications does not do away with the problem. There is a necessary and ineradicable ambiguity in all language, because every word comes with a spurious claim to fixity and completeness. So just as under the skin of all logical problems we can detect a throbbing metaphysical heart, so through the veil of linguistic ambiguity we can discern the traits of logical complexities and beyond those the features of metaphysical realities.

So the whole of the *Lysis* after the didactic conversation, shows that every statement, which may originally reveal some true perspective, wandering beyond or dragged outside its proper context, can be overturned.

Thus after Plato has introduced the thought that it is only what is neither good nor bad that can seek the good – a favourite formulation of his – and after carefully introducing and elucidating the distinction between what Aristotle was to name property and accident, and after stating the conclusion in exuberant tones, he makes Socrates suddenly recoil, fearing that it was all nothing but a dream. I think the passage 217a-218c was meant by Plato to convey the most fundamental lesson in philosophy: Never rest in the illusion that you have taken hold of final truth!

So in what follows Socrates overturns all the previous conclusions. In 219b5-220b5, in the space of a single Stephanus page, Plato introduces the problem of infinite regress (which is mentioned briefly in the *Republic* and features prominently in the *Parmenides*) and the seminal notion of the final or ultimate good, commingled together. The idea of an ultimate good carries with it the idea of the relativity of all

particular good, which in turn is related to the idea of the imperfection and insufficiency of all that is determinate, particular, finite. Every particular good is good as a means to something else. In the end only the activity itself, the creativity, the ceaseless affirmation and realization of the good, is good in itself. Between the lines of the *Lysis* we can thus read the whole of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, amply vindicating Whitehead's contention that all of Western philosophy can best be characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato.

In 222a-b, by a playful turn of the argument, Socrates humours the mood of the two boys Menexenus and Lysis and the somewhat elder lad Hippothales by drawing a conclusion that is as good as, but no better than, any of the earlier ones, as Socrates himself immediately goes on to show (222b-d). As in all of the elenctic discourses, the dialogue ends in apparently total *aporia* (222e).

II

Parmenides

Prefatory

The *Parmenides* has commonly been regarded as puzzling — perhaps simply because its message is translucently clear. No less a Platonist than A. E. Taylor has seen it as a 'metaphysical jest' (*Plato*, p.361). So there must be something puzzling about it after all. Perhaps the explanation lies in the mastery with which Plato keeps the metaphysical dimension or metaphysical implications completely submerged under the logical dimensions and implications.

The logical and metaphysical aspects or dimensions of the *Parmenides* are inseparable. They were not separate or separable for Plato. As for Parmenides, so also for Plato, to be intelligible and to be were the same thing. Whatever Plato may have had in the foreground of his attention when writing the *Parmenides* — and logical questions seem to have been very much on Plato's mind in his later years when the *Parmenides* was probably written — the ontological undertones could not at any point have been absent for him. The metaphysical significations that a Plotinus could read in the second part were of the essence of Plato's philosophical outlook. Since my purpose, as I have repeatedly stated, is not to discover what Plato thought or meant, but to develop a philosophy inspired by my reading of Plato, I will not here, any more than elsewhere, seek to justify my interpretation by any

elaborate examination of constructions or arguments. I do not seek to offer an exegesis of Plato's text, but, Plotinus-like, to give voice to the prophecy that rumbled in the depths of Plato's creative soul. I do not claim that what I give here represents Plato's thought: enough for me to say that it is a philosophy inspired by Plato's work.

Overview

Heraclitus and Parmenides both had profound but opposed insights into the nature of things. Heraclitus saw that all things in the world around us are evanescent, ceaselessly mutating. As Plato puts it in the *Timaeus* (50a), you cannot even say of any given thing 'this' or 'that'; all you can say is 'here is a such', and as you say it, it is already a different such.

Parmenides saw that, to a mind that demands intelligibility and understanding, the being of the imperfect, the particular hemmed with limitations and negations, the mutable, is necessarily questionable. How can the imperfect be? To the mind all being is a mystery, yet the being of the imperfect is an affront to the mind that leaves it permanently smarting. For, for Parmenides, to be thought and to be is the same thing, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai* (fragment 3). Hence, only what is whole and perfect can be. All that Parmenides says in specific terms in characterizing THE ONE THAT IS, is metaphor and myth, and could be nothing but that, for how can you specify or characterize what is beyond all particular characteristics? The essence is only this: only what is whole and perfect can be thought of as real.

Plato appropriated the insights of both Heraclitus and Parmenides and never gave up or closed his eyes to either. But they could not stand side by side in the same mind without reconciliation. In Socrates' view of the world as falling into an intelligible realm on the one side and a perceptible realm on the other side – an intelligible realm that confers on the perceptible its reality and a perceptible realm that lends the intelligible its actuality – Plato found the reconciliation. And just as he found that the flux of Heraclitus had to be bathed in the rays of the intelligible to be capable of being thought, so also he found that the One of Parmenides had to accept the humiliation of passing through the evanescence and contradictions of actual existence if it is to be anything to us finite, particular minds.

The language of birth and generation is congenital to Plato's thought. The concept of procreation in beauty, *tokos en kalôi*, is fundamental to his understanding of reality and intelligence. Yet at the

opposite pole stands his conception of the eternity of the forms — immutable, unchangeable forms. The all-consuming Heraclitian Fire ordaining fluidity and transience for all existents strove against the all-pervading permanence of the Parmenidean One, and the clash erupted in the all-negating dialectic of the *Parmenides*.

The critical arguments of Parmenides in his discussion with Socrates in the first part are of the selfsame nature as Socrates' arguments in the elenctic dialogues. They show that any determinate formulation of the hypothesis of a relation between the forms and their particular instances involves contradictions. Necessarily: for the form as an entity and the instance as an entity are both fictions resulting from the fragmentation of the wholeness of understanding. It is necessary to distinguish theoretically the intelligible and the perceptible to draw attention to the reality and creativity of the mind. But any instance of intelligibility is a whole act of creative intelligence.

The intelligible is in its own nature supra-temporal, and in this sense eternal. But it comes into being and passes out of being. An original thought, a poem, a song, is eternal, yet is born and passes away. Nothing that is determinate is everlasting, for all that exists is transient.

The self-evidence of an idea or principle does not endow it with finality. The self-evidence of the idea or principle means that it needs no justification and can issue in harmonious and consistent consequences. Every good philosophical system is such an unfoldment of self-evident ideas and principles. But the self-evident idea or principle can always be placed in a wider or a different context, and is then seen to be imperfect. The idea of beauty does not call for 'derivation' from a higher principle, and the ascent to the idea of Beauty in the *Symposium* is an ascent to ultimate Reality, and we can truthfully assert with Keats that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty', but in the same breath we can go on and ask, Is beauty the same as truth?, and then answer, equally truthfully, No, beauty is other than truth.

According to the *Republic*, to my mind, dialectic, destroying all hypotheses, *tas hypotheseis anairousa*, is not meant to lead to or end in any first principles, but to a new dimension of the Socratic principle of ignorance. Dialectic as the consummate exercise of reason ends in the revelation that no determinate formulation of thought can be finally true: the only *alêtheia* □ is the active *phronêsis* □ itself. Thus understood, the logical and metaphysical aspects of the *Parmenides* are inseparable. Even if we suppose that Plato had the logical aspect uppermost, or even solely, in his mind when writing the *Parmenides*, we cannot fault Plotinus for finding clearly writ in it the metaphysical

significations to which he gave an original expression in his philosophy.

The first part

Burnet asserts flatly, "The *Parmenides* is a criticism of the doctrine of forms as stated in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*" (*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, 1914, p.253). This is the accepted wisdom, for the first part of the *Parmenides* at any rate. I have stated my rejection of this view both in chapter 1, "The Intelligible Forms", and elsewhere. Here I will simply summarize my position as follows: It is misleading to speak of a 'doctrine' or 'theory' of forms. We have, first, the creative Socratic conception of intelligible forms. We have, then, various attempts by Plato to relate the forms to the multiple particular manifestations of the forms. It is these tentative articulations of the relation of the intelligible to the perceptible particulars – articulations to which Plato at no time gave a fixed form and with which he at no time was satisfied – which are subjected to critical examination in the first part of the *Parmenides* as a part, as I see it, of the overall design of the *Parmenides* to show that no definitive formulations of language or of thought (these are only two aspects of the same thing) can be free of contradiction. This we should have learnt sufficiently from the Socratic elenchus and from what the *Republic* says about dialectic. And it is this that explains the connection between the two parts of the *Parmenides* and shows that the dialogue has a unity which has eluded many scholars and commentators.

The examination of the forms in the first part of the *Parmenides*, then, is not a criticism of the Socratic conception of intelligible forms, which was the foundation of the whole of Socrates' and Plato's philosophical outlook, but a critical examination of certain tentative developments and outgrowths of the conception. I see the introduction of Zeno's argument in the opening section as an indication of the intent and purpose of the whole dialogue. Parmenides' rationalistic monism had been attacked by his opponents as involving inescapable contradictions. Zeno, as he is made to state explicitly, was responding, not by arguing for Parmenides' position, but by showing that the opponents' position led to equally damaging contradictions. What are we to conclude from this? The Parmenidean One being, like the Good of the *Republic*, beyond being and beyond knowledge, could not, strictly, be characterized in any specific terms. So even the affirmations of The Way of Truth were only permissible by special concession. The

essence of Reality is strictly ineffable: you cannot contain what is perfect in the moulds of thought and language which, by their very nature, must be limited, determinate, imperfect. In Zeno's enterprise Plato finds confirmation of his own conception of dialectic as the destruction of all hypotheses (postulates): no determinate formulation of thought is immune to logical refutation. In what follows of the dialogue we are to see the application of this principle, first to various articulations employing the concept of intelligible forms, and then to various articulations employing the concept of *to hen* or *to on*. If that is so, how can we still maintain that in the arguments of the *Parmenides* we can discern metaphysical insights? The answer is simple: If we are examining our concept of Being (Reality), how can we not at the same time be looking into what Being (Reality) means for us? For truly, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai* (Parmenides, Fr.3).

The opponents of Parmenides have shown that his conception of the One leads to contradictions. Zeno has shown that the assumption of plurality in things leads to contradictions. That should not spell the end of rational discourse. The principle that all determinate formulations of thought involve contradiction is liable to abuse in two directions: on the one hand it can lead to the suicidal irrationality of Antisthenes, on the other hand it can lead to the corruptive eristics of a Euthydemus. The destruction of all postulates demanded by dialectic is necessary for freeing the human mind from the bondage of preconceptions, prejudices, superstitions, in all areas — science, religion, and even quotidian practical dealings. But to live, we have to work, to think, to formulate theories, to lay down maxims and rules, and for all of these the foundation has to be certain 'accepted' ideas — accepted but not immune to examination and demolition when need be.

'Socrates' sums up the argument of Zeno. If things are many, they will necessarily be both like and unlike. (No matter how he showed this.) But things like cannot be unlike and things unlike cannot be like. Therefore things cannot be many. 'Socrates' rightly says that Zeno was simply reiterating Parmenides' thesis in a different formulation. Parmenides had said that *to on* is one, and the One is all there is, and so the many can have no being. Zeno argued that the being of the many involves impossibilities, *ei gar polla eiê, paschoi an ta adunata* (127d-e). Plato knew that any statement can be falsified. That is the gist of what the *Republic* says about dialectic. To refute this position and that leaves us nowhere. The many — all existents — are shot through and through with contradiction. But they are there; they stare us in the face; we ourselves are part of that being that is not. The task of philosophy is not to show, or not stop at showing, that finite, particular existents are

not, but to show how and why that is so. That is what the whole of Plato's philosophy, culminating in the *Republic*, does when it reveals that the whole world of given actualities is insubstantial shadow and transient becoming that only obtains reality in the eternity of creative intelligence. (This is my formulation, but I believe it does not falsify Plato's insight.) The *Parmenides* adds nothing to the essence of Plato's philosophy. It only shows that, starting from the Parmenidean *to on* and the Parmenidean *to hen* we find, as we found in the *Republic*, that the imperfect being of existents issues from the One. The One breeds, generates, the many. The many without the One are an impossibility; the One without the many is unthinkable. This is Plotinus and this is my *Let Us Philosophize*, but it issues from Plato as necessarily as the many issue from the One in the *Parmenides*.

'Socrates' proceeds to attack the problem. Existents, whether one or many, are riddled with contradictions. (In the sequel, the One begins to crack as soon as we affirm that it *is*, or that it is *one*.) But we have the concepts, the intelligible forms, of likeness and unlikeness, of unity and plurality. These ideas (I know I am trying the patience of academic philosophers, but I am only emulating the master himself), as such, are stable, unalterable. But there is nothing to prevent their being found along each other in things. Likeness is not unlikeness; unity is not plurality. But the like can be unlike, and as 'Parmenides' will soon be demonstrating, if we say that the one is many, that the one is not many, that the many are one, that the many are not one, all of these positions (hypotheses) can be shown to be true and all can also be shown to be false. This sums up the second part of the *Parmenides*.

'Socrates' says that, if we consider the intelligible forms in themselves, then indeed it would be monstrous if 'likeness' were shown to be simultaneously 'unlikeness'. The intelligible forms as such have self-evidence and are not amenable to contradiction. But that contrary intelligible characters should be displayed in the same thing is no wonder. I think that Plato here had in mind the logical problem of the combination of forms with which he was engaged in his late period. And while in what immediately follows 'Parmenides' shows the insufficiency (the incoherence) of various tentative formulations of the idea of inherence of the intelligible forms in the particular objects, two things stand unaffected: (1) The intelligible forms as the *sine qua non* of all intelligent or rational discourse, as 'Parmenides' affirms at the end of this discussion (135b-c). (2) The suggestion that the combination of forms in things explains the presence of contrary characters in the same thing is neither subjected to critical examination nor developed here but remains standing in the background.

'Socrates' says that the presence or association of intelligible forms in things does away with Zeno's objection to the supposition of a plurality in things. Without questioning the reality or intelligibility of the forms, 'Parmenides' proceeds to subject the notion of the presence of the forms in, or their association with, things, to criticism. This is fully in keeping with – is indeed only another exemplification of – what we have been saying. To see this as a criticism of Plato's position or doctrine or theory is only possible if we assume that Plato had a fixed position, doctrine, or theory, as regards the relation of the intelligible forms to things. I deny that. Indeed I maintain that to speak of a 'relation' here is to ask for trouble. Understanding – the act of intelligence – is a whole. To speak of a relation is to fragment the whole by creating abstractions. We legitimately create abstractions, fragmenting the whole, for our theoretical purposes; but to rest in the fragmentation, to accept the abstractions as somehow final, is to fall into error. This is a theme that I have dealt with so often that I have no need to expand on it here.

'Socrates' has begun by instancing the forms of similarity and difference, unity and multiplicity. 'Parmenides' inquires whether 'Socrates' also says there are forms of justice, beauty, goodness. Yes. Of man, fire, water? 'Socrates' says he has often hesitated about these. What of hair, mud, dirt? No way! 'Parmenides' chides 'Socrates': his refusal to admit these is only due to his unripe years; philosophy has not yet taken hold of him sufficiently (130b-e). It is likely that in the first part of the *Parmenides* Plato was addressing certain controversies and discussions that had arisen in the Academy. If so, then in this passage he was suggesting that while Socrates did not trouble about such a problem because he was exclusively interested in moral questions, proper consideration shows that (and here once more I will confessedly offend by using language distinct from Plato's) whenever we raise a thing from the formless *melée* of experiential givenness by giving it a name, we are introducing an intelligible form.

'Parmenides' has no difficulty in faulting the metaphors – and they can be no more than metaphors – for representing the relation between the forms and the objects. This is part of the dialectic lesson intended by Plato. I will not go into the details of the arguments here any more than into those of the second part. Academic philosophers have given us our fill in this matter.

I am not going to comment further on the discussion of the forms in this part of the *Parmenides* (except for the so-called problem of the Third Man) as I have sufficiently explained my position in the essay on "The Intelligible Forms" (chapter 1). I will only make two brief

remarks. First, the problems and questions raised in this part may have been problems and questions raised in the Academy and reproduced here by Plato to exercise his students' and his readers' minds. Second, all the problems revolving around the idea of participation boil down to this: all language is metaphorical (and hence I say that all thought is mythical) and when the metaphor is pressed, it cracks. This is a principle that controversialists use unconsciously as a weapon against their opponents without realizing that the same weapon can be as effectively used against their own positions.

In fact in Socrates' immediate rejoinder, we have the true answer to the riddle: "But, Parmenides, said Socrates, may not each of these forms be a thought, which can properly be nowhere but in a mind?" (132b.) But of course, the words in which that true answer is couched are, like all words, full of pitfalls, and Plato permits 'Parmenides' to exploit these.

The arguments of Zeno of Elea showed not only the insufficiency of all linguistic formulations but also the imperfection and contradictoriness of all particular actuality. The first part of *Appearance and Reality* was written down in Zeno's words some twenty-four centuries before F. H. Bradley was born. This is the logico-ontological lesson of the *Parmenides*.

It has been said that Socrates' dialectic derives from Zeno's. Not only do I not think that Socrates needed Zeno's precedent for developing his elenctic procedure, but even if we say that Socrates adopted Zeno's method, we have to realize that he put it to such a radically different use as to make of it something totally different. Zeno's intent was logico-metaphysical, Socrates' was purely moral. Socrates' purpose was not, except incidentally, to show the contradictoriness of propositions or the imperfection of existents, but to clear the confusion in our minds regarding moral values and principles that govern human life. It is in the *Parmenides* that Plato once more puts the dialectic in the service of ontology.

Paradox is the shock that proclaims that a concept has presumed to annex territory to which it has no legal title. Or, changing the metaphor we may say: every concept is a fiction; when it forgets the humility proper to its insubstantiality, Reason shows it to be nothing but a bubble that explodes with a loud sound. From Zeno's riddles, through the Third Man, to Russell's paradox and beyond, we will find nothing but useful conceptual fictions transgressing their proper jurisdiction.

The 'Third Man'

In a short passage, 132a1-b2, 'Parmenides' enunciates a riddle which, thanks to Aristotle, has come to be known as the Third Man problem, and which has claimed more of the time and labour of scholars than far weightier problems. Here is the passage in Cornford's translation:

How do you feel about this? I imagine your ground for believing in a single Form in each case is this: when it seems to you that a number of things are large, there seems, I suppose, to be a single character which is the same when you look at them all; hence you think that Largeness is a single thing.

True, he replied.

But now take Largeness itself and the other things which are large. Suppose you look at all these in the same way in your mind's eye, will not yet another unity make its appearance — a Largeness by virtue of which they all appear large?

So it would seem.

If so, a second Form of Largeness will present itself, over and above Largeness itself and the things that share in it; and again, covering all these, yet another, which will make all of them large. So each of your Forms will no longer be one, but an indefinite number.

The whole trick lies in the words: *ti d' auto to mega kai talla ta megala, ean hōsautōs tēi psuchēi epī panta idēs*, more particularly in this last phrase: *ean hōsautōs tēi psuchēi epī panta idēs*, which Cornford renders, "Suppose you look at all these in the same way in your mind's eye". The error lies in objectifying the intelligible form and ranging it along with its particular manifestations as a thing observed by the mind. The intelligible form is the mind itself in the act of observing the things; it is this very activity of the mind conferring meaningfulness on things by taking them up into itself under a form of its own creation. A form is not an object or a thing that can ever be objectified. It is the meaning which has its whole being and reality as a moment of the creativity of the mind.

The riddle propounded in these few lines of the *Parmenides* has had many metamorphoses, from the problem of infinite regress, to the Third Man, to the modern problem of self-predication. The crux is always the same. If we do not stop at the self-evidence of the idea, at Socrates'

foolish 'it is by beauty that all things beautiful are beautiful', we slide into a labyrinth of falsehood. When Bertrand Russell resolved the 'paradox' he himself had discovered in the theory of Frege, his solution was nothing but a restricted form of Socrates' principle, for in essence the proposal of a hierarchy of sentences meant that at any particular plane or level of theorizing, we have to stop at Types that are to be taken as final for that level.

Plato was fully aware of the error in the argument of 'Parmenides'. In the *Republic*, 597c, explaining why God could not have made two forms of 'bed', he says that, had God created two forms of 'bed', there would appear yet another form whose character those other two would have, and it is that character that would be the 'bed' that truly is, the real 'bed', *kai eiê an ho estin klinê ekeinê all' ouch hai duo*. The form is not a thing on the plane of particular things that exist in the world, but is the intelligible character in the mind, be it the mind of God or the mind of a human being, for the intelligible is the real, the only reality.

The second part

The second part of the *Parmenides* is wholly what Plato plainly says it is, an exercise in dialectic (in the sense of the *Republic*) — an exercise intended to bring out the twin core-lessons of dialectic: (1) Logically, no determinate statement is simply true; no determinate statement can be permitted the mortal hubris of pretending to finality; if it does it can always be shown to be false; to understand any statement we have to attend not only to what it says but also to what it does not say. (2) Metaphysically, no particular, finite, determinate thing can claim simply to be; in itself and by itself it cannot have the intelligibility of reality; the question can always be put to it, "Whence and wherefor art thou?"; to be justified, its particular, finite, determinate actuality has to be effaced in other than itself. And all of this is nothing but the germination of the seed of the Socratic elenchus. The scholarly dissections, analyses, and criticisms of the hypotheses and arguments of the second part of the *Parmenides* are a good intellectual game, but when they are thought to give us (or, more often, to annihilate) the meaning or the essence of the *Parmenides* (or of any dialogue of Plato), they are far worse than useless; they are deadly. In endlessly splitting and resplitting the husks they let the kernel go to waste. The only way to appropriate the whole seed is to plant it in living intelligence, to flower there and bear fruit that the erudite cannot

detect in the seed however minutely they may dissect it or under however powerful a logical microscope they may examine it.

I can understand how Plotinus could find his whole philosophy clearly written between the lines of the *Parmenides*. I too have shared Plotinus' experience. But I have no desire to add here my own 'recension' of the *Parmenides*. The whole of Book Two of my *Let Us Philosophize* is nothing but that.

The error of the Neoplatonists, perhaps of Plotinus himself, was the attempt to give fixity to insights that can only find expression in fugitive metaphor or self-annihilating argument. They should have learned from Plato, particularly from the *Republic* and from the *Parmenides* itself, that no determinate formulation of thought can claim definitive validity. F. M. Cornford refers to 'the mirage of Neoplatonic mysticism' (Preface, p. vi.). It is only a mirage when it seeks finality, the metaphor then is very apt; but not when it seeks insight, for then it is truly watered by the fount of Reality.

Throughout the arguments of the second part of the *Parmenides* we have phrases such as 'in a sense', 'but not in every sense', 'as such', 'in so far as', and the young Aristoteles in his responses uses such expressions as 'The argument seems to lead to that conclusion', 'It seems possible to argue in that way'. This is part and parcel of the lesson of the dialogue. The whole may be regarded as a warning against what I have elsewhere called the treachery of words. No statement, however carefully phrased, however cautiously hemmed in with qualifications, can be accepted without reservation.

Thus, if we hand over without reservation our living intelligence to words or to a logic that forgets its inescapable limitations, then, as the *Parmenides* concludes (166c), whatever we assume to be or not to be, it will seem that both the One and the Many, will be, both in relation to themselves and to each other, all things and no-thing.

CHAPTER NINE

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

I

IN THE EARLY DIALOGUES we find Socrates inquiring into the nature of this or that virtue. Though the inquiry never comes to a fixed conclusion, the examination again and again points to the unity of all virtue and to the identity of virtue with knowledge. Then the question is raised, What knowledge — knowledge of what? But nowhere in the early dialogues do we find him inquiring directly into the nature of knowledge. In the *Meno* we first find Plato's exposition of elements of his own theory of knowledge, yet even in the *Meno* the investigation of knowledge is indirect. The problem examined is the teachability of virtue and how it may be possible to come by the knowledge we seek. And in the *Republic* (where we find the fullest exposition of Plato's mature ontological epistemology) the question examined is not 'What is knowledge?' but 'What knowledge does the philosopher seek?' And when the question comes at last to be posed in the *Theaetetus*, the examination does not proceed in typical Socratic fashion. So while we can hardly glance through a couple of pages in the early dialogues without coming over the word *epistêmê* or one of its synonyms or cognates, we do not meet with the direct question 'What is knowledge?' until we get to the *Theaetetus*. The knowledge we find ourselves concerned with there is neither the knowledge that is one with virtue of the early dialogues nor the knowledge of the *Republic* that is indissolubly married to Reality, but the more homely variety that all of us, from the most ignorant to the most learned, in our humdrum daily lives cannot do without.

II

It may be that the *Meno* was Plato's first direct assault on the problem of knowledge. In the *Protagoras* the question of the teachability of virtue was tackled from many sides, without however raising the question about knowledge as such. I venture to suggest that it was at this point that Plato raised the question and began constructing his own answer to it. So, in the *Meno*, he introduces, first, the doctrine of anamnesis, clothing in a 'tale told by priests and priestesses' the Socratic insight that all true knowledge stems from within the mind; then, the idea of inquiry by means of hypotheses, as theorizing the Socratic procedure (developing the theory of the method further in the *Phaedo*); and then, the distinction between *epistêmê* and *orthê doxa*, true knowledge and right opinion, which, in the *Republic*, is worked into the doctrine of the Divided Line.

The question put forward by Meno – whether virtue is acquired by instruction, by practice, by nature, or by some other means – is in fact a crucial question which keeps cropping up throughout the dialogues, and the answer, which is not a simple but a complex one, has to be gleaned from the whole of Plato's writings. But in the *Meno* itself the question is immediately pushed aside, to be replaced by the question: What is virtue?, which produces a miniature 'definition' dialogue, with all the typical features of the early 'definition' dialogues, compressed into a few pages, before it in turn gives place to the question of how we come by any knowledge at all.

The myth of reincarnation, embedding the doctrine of reminiscence, is introduced in the *Meno* to 'solve' the puzzle of learning. The myth is a 'tale told by priests and priestesses' and the doctrine is a parable which says no more than that you bring out 'knowledge' from the unfathomed depths of your own mind — you may say it was stored there in an earlier life, or you may say it is found there because your mind is rooted in ultimate reality: both versions are equally myths, both giving expression to the insight, which is all that matters for Socrates, that the kind of 'knowledge' that matters for us specifically as human beings does not come from anywhere 'out there', but only from 'in here'.

III

In the *Phaedo* we have a complete blend of Socratic and Platonic elements. Here I will deal with what relates to the problem of

knowledge without entering into the tricky question of what belongs to whom.

As we could easily learn from the early dialogues, reality, *ousia*, is not apprehended by the bodily senses but by pure reason; knowledge is of the *eidos*, the *idea*: justice, goodness, beauty, largeness, health, strength, these are intelligible but not perceptible, though instances of them are of course perceptible; the body is a hindrance to the apprehension of reality, *to alêthes*; when the body is ailing, our quest of the real, *to on*, is hindered; to attain knowledge, the soul (mind) has to concentrate on itself, and aim at detachment from the body as far as that is feasible; pure reality is only accessible to pure intelligence.

The sight of sticks or stones, imperfectly equal or plainly unequal, triggers the idea of equality in the mind, but the idea is different in nature from the stick or stone. Even if, taking leave of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles and of the Platonic principle of the inherent imperfection of all phenomenal actuality, we assume that we may come across equal things in the sensible world, still we will never find *auto to ison* ('the equal', equality pure and simple) anywhere but in the mind. The Aristotelian 'abstraction' merely veils the mystery by giving it a name: beneath the dead shell of 'abstraction' lies the living reality of concept formation, the creation of a form that renders the given content of experience meaningful.

The intelligible forms are inherent in the mind in the sense that the mind is their spring and abode. They are not produced by anything other than the mind. But they are not Cartesian 'innate ideas'. Knowledge of sensible things is not independent of experience. It always starts from experience. "We are agreed also upon this, that we have not obtained this thought and could not have obtained it except by sight or touch or some other of the senses" (*Phaedo*, 75a). Plato thus clearly affirms that sense-experience is the 'source' of all our primary ideas. Locke as against Descartes was in the right here. Yet though sensation provides the given content of experience, that content remains mute and dark if not taken up by the mind into the luminous regions of its intelligible patterns. I would not say with Moore that we perceive sense data. Rather we have sense data and we perceive the object by a mental act which sculpts the object out of the continuum of experience. Here we are speaking of empirical knowledge, which forms the ground-floor of all knowledge; but the mind then builds second- and third-order forms, which are forms of pure reason. At the highest reaches of thought where we are concerned with what is of the greatest concern for us as human beings, we deal entirely with pure ideas generated solely by the mind.

What is essential here is the establishment of the distinction between the world of things presented in our experience and the intelligible world of the mind that engenders the forms that give meaning to things. This distinction has become so much ingrained in our intellectual heritage that we stand before this part of the *Phaedo* and puzzle, What is Plato trying to prove here? Plato is not proving anything here; he is putting over to us the conception of the intelligible world that we owe in the first place to Socrates and that we have now come to take so much for granted that we think we can forget about it and say that the objectively given is all there is. The objectively given will never give us values, will never tell us what is right or wrong. When Locke reduced all there is to what is objectively given, Hume quickly and rightly drew the conclusion: facts will not yield norms; 'is' will not breed 'ought'. Where then do we find the norm? Only in the mind, as a creation of the mind. Whence does it derive its validity? From the reality of creative intelligence as the seat and fount of our proper worth and excellence.

In the *Phaedo* we already have the principle which comes to full flower in the *Republic*: the philosopher's progress towards the apprehension of reality is essentially a process of progressively becoming like that reality; it is by ourselves becoming real, divine, that we apprehend the real, the divine; to put it differently, it is by becoming alive to the reality in us, to our own reality, that we know reality. This is the same insight expressed in the mystic ascent described in the *Symposium*: it is an ascent begun and concluded entirely and purely in the mind, and is crowned by a sudden vision of absolute beauty, just as in the *Republic* the ascent culminates in the vision of absolute goodness — beauty, goodness, truth being names (aspects) of the one Reality that transcends all determinate forms.

This is the basic teaching of the *Phaedo*, which remained as the core of the whole of Plato's thought to the end. In the late dialogues, Plato examines specific problems which in no way affect the basic outlook.

IV

The special contribution of the *Republic* to the theory of knowledge is encapsulated in the figure of the Divided Line, which in turn is picturesquely represented in the famous Allegory of the Cave. The ground-principle on which the whole philosophy of the *Republic* rests, is that knowledge and reality are two sides of one thing, so that what is

fully real – and only what is fully real – is fully knowable; and what has only an imperfect share of reality, can only be known imperfectly.

Consequently there are two main types or levels of knowledge. (1) Knowledge through the bodily senses is knowledge *peri genesin*, it produces *doxa* and can never rise above *doxa*. (2) Knowledge through pure reason is knowledge *peri ousian* (*Republic*, 534a). Each of these two main divisions is subdivided into two sections, thus giving the four levels of knowledge represented by the four sections of the Divided Line. "Corresponding to these sections, assume there are four states that come about in the mind (*psuchê*): Intelligence (*noêsis*) at the highest level, thought (*dianoia*) at the second, at the third belief (*pistis*), and at the lowest illusion (*eikasia*)" (*Republic*, 511d-e).

I add (going beyond Plato in expression but not, I believe, in essence) that knowledge *peri ousian* does not yield any objective, determinate truths. It is not factual. Its exercise is *phronêsis* or *noêsis*, and that exercise is the life of *nous*, of creative intelligence, that is the highest understanding that we can ever have, and because it can never give us factual knowledge, the highest wisdom, which finds its perfection in the preservation of the integrity of reason, amounts to a confession of ignorance. (See chapter 6, "Knowledge and Reality".)

V

When F. M. Cornford's translation with running commentary of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* was published under the title *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (1935), he tacitly disclaimed, in the Preface, responsibility for the title. He had good reason for that. If we are to look for a theory of knowledge of Plato's, we have to quarry for it all over his works and, important as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* no doubt are, we will not find there the fundamentals or the most important elements, let alone the whole, of Plato's 'theory of knowledge'.

As Cornford says in the Introduction, "The *Theaetetus* will formulate and examine the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out of account the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience" (p.7). In the *Parmenides* this is affirmed in the clearest terms by Parmenides at the close of the first part of the dialogue. This is also what we can learn from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The 'knowledge' that sensible experience yields

hovers in the Divided Line between the higher level of the lower plane and the lower level of the higher plane, but cannot rise above that.

In the opening pages of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates makes his famous profession of practising midwifery. Cornford draws attention (p.27) to the similarity between the introductory section of the *Meno* where the anamnesis 'doctrine' is introduced and that of the *Theaetetus* where the midwifery simile is introduced. Doesn't this indicate that the 'doctrine' equally with the maieutic image is a symbolic expression of the one truth that Socrates found certain — that all knowledge springs from the mind? Plato may have been intrigued by the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis and found in that a plausible explanation or at any rate an apt representation of the Socratic insight, but in the maieusis image he hit upon a happier metaphorical expression of the philosophical truth.

Richard Kraut sees the role of intellectual midwife assumed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* as a new departure "in the dramatic structure of the middle dialogues" (*The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, 1992, ed. Richard Kraut, p.17). I think this is to find too much in too little. Throughout the early dialogues Socrates plays the role of midwife, helping his interlocutors bring to birth their thoughts. And in the dialogues commonly regarded as preceding the *Theaetetus*, Socrates repeatedly uses the language and the images of sex and generation. The instances are too numerous to list. A line in Aristophanes where a student complains that someone thumping at the door has caused his cogitation to miscarry seems to indicate that the use of the midwifery image was habitual with Socrates (*Clouds*, 137). If it occurred to Plato in the *Theaetetus* to tie that playfully with Socrates' maternal heritage, I can't see how that constitutes a "departure".

After the preliminaries, Socrates leads to the question, What is knowledge?, and as in the early dialogues, we have a very broad conception of knowledge. Geometry and astronomy, the doctor's skill, the craftsman's know-how, all of these are *sophia*, and *sophia* is the same as *epistêmê*. So what is this knowledge?

At 151d-e the boy Theaetetus advances the first serious answer to the question: "It seems to me that he who knows senses (perceives, *aisthanesthai*) that which he knows, and as far as it appears to me now, knowledge is nothing other than sensation (perception, *aisthêsis*)."

Socrates is quick to identify this position with Protagoras's doctrine that man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not (152a). A little further on he connects it also with the Heraclitean doctrine of flux. (This, it seems,

Plato does, because he needs to work the doctrine of flux into the theory of perception which he is about to introduce.)

Perception – both as experience and as content of experience – is a product. No event in the phenomenal world is simple. All sensation is the outcome of a conjunction of factors: the factors may belong partly to the percipient individual and partly to the ambient world, or they may reside in the body of the percipient. In the product – the perception, which is one whole – we can distinguish a subjective dimension and an objective dimension. We may monitor the subjective dimension in various ways, determining the conditions under which a specific sensation is produced, but the subjective aspect can neither be reduced to those conditions, nor can it be objectified in any way.

"What you call white colour is not itself something outside your eyes nor in your eyes, nor must you assign it any place of its own" (153d-e). Only the whole is real. Colour is not in the flower, nor in your eye, nor in your brain. Colour is an aspect of the whole, and the only thing that embraces that whole is your mind. Berkeley's philosophy gives expression to the same insight.

At 154b-155d Socrates raises some problems we encounter when we consider – on the Protagorean assumption – sizes and numbers in relation to one another. Cornford says of these 'puzzles' that their "relevance to their context is by no means obvious. Nor is it easy to understand why anyone should be perplexed by them" (p.41). Quite on the contrary, I find in this passage significant support for the principle that nothing particular or actual *is* in and by itself. Anything is what it is in a context, a situation taken for the purpose in hand as a whole; and as the situation – like all things actual – is always changing, so the particular thing housed in that context is always becoming what it was not. When Socrates then says, "Do you now understand why these things are so, according to what we say Protagoras meant?", he means that things must be so as long as we take appearance as our object of knowledge.

On a simpler level we may think of this passage as one of those trick problems that Plato often plants in the course of his works, leaving it to his readers to work them out for themselves — in this case by establishing the distinction between quality and relation.

This does not contradict the *Phaedo* (pace Cornford, p.44), nor must we regard the *Phaedo* position as erroneous. The relations as forms instanced in the relata – more accurately, the relation as implying a pair of opposed forms each instanced in one of the relata – is as good (and as bad) a theory (a logic) as the theory of 'forces' with which our scientists work so happily. That we have come into possession of the

conception of a relation between relata does not justify us in considering the earlier view of relations as qualities to be erroneous, any more than the Copernican theory belies the naïve perception of the sun making its diurnal journey around the earth.

In the theory of sense-perception presented in 155d-157c we should, I think, distinguish two elements: (1) the philosophical element affirming the fluidity of all things actual and their inseparability; (2) a physico-physiological element, which is a scientific hypothesis (not in the Platonic sense of the word, but in the modern sense). The first element offers a genuine and valuable philosophical insight. The second is for historians of science to comment on.

At 157d Socrates asks Theaetetus whether he is satisfied with the view that nothing is, but only becomes, good or beautiful or any of the other qualities they had been speaking of. This clearly indicates that the foregoing discussion was confined to perception of particular things within the sphere of becoming. Thus proscribed the account may be accepted as satisfactory; but as the sequel will show, such perception does not yield knowledge in the true sense. The process by which a thing becomes this or that describes but does not explain how the thing has this or that character. The reductionist description does not make the thing intelligible. Thus this account of a thing becoming such or such does not replace Socrates' 'foolish' 'by beauty all things beautiful become beautiful'. Nor does it replace the *Phaedo* account of becoming and change in terms of the advance and withdrawal or perishing of forms, for that account related to the sphere of understanding. Exposure to fire makes iron hot: that is a piece of empirical knowledge, of immense practical importance, but as dark as any magical incantation. Without the notions 'fire', 'exposure', 'heat', which are all children of the mind, the statement cannot be made, or if made by some celestial being, would be to us nothing but a succession of meaningless sounds, if it could be even that, for a sound is not a sound but for a discerning mind. And even with the help of the concepts 'fire', 'exposure', 'heat', the statement becomes 'knowledge', but does it give us understanding? No. Because it relates to the world of shadows which have no inherent intelligibility.

VI

In a most important passage, 184b-185e, Plato argues for the mental origin of the ideas of existence, sameness, unity and the like. These ideas are not to be found in the objective sphere. Firstly, even in the

case of simple perception, as seeing a colour or hearing a sound, it is not the eye that sees or the ear that hears, but the mind or soul (*eite psuchên eite hoti dei kalein*, 184d) sees through the eye and hears through the ear. Still more, in the case of thoughts that apply to the objects of different senses, there is no special organ through which these are perceived, but the mind itself by itself considers these, *autê di' hautês hê psuchê ta koina moi phainetai peri pantôn episkopein* (185d-e). The argument is sound and of vital importance. True, it does not prove anything, as we can see from the numbers of intelligent and erudite scholars who have not been convinced by it. The argument, like all of Plato's arguments for the forms elsewhere in the dialogues, simply elucidates the conception of the intelligible as distinct from the given content of experience.

In the following passage (186a-e) the idea is unfolded further. The mind has cognizance of the sensible through the organs of the body. Even simple perception involves a conceptual element. Bare sensation is possible to all animals. But it only becomes perception when it is clothed in a judgement: here is something green; this is hot. In the judgement the given element has no being or truth in itself; these are supplied by the mind: *ousia* and *alêtheia*, as we know from the *Republic*, are inseparable and pertain only to the intelligible.

Knowledge is not to be sought in what the senses deliver to us but in what the mind brings forth from its own treasure-house, it is not to be found in the given content of experience, but in the patterns into which the mind articulates the contents of experience. This is true of all levels of 'knowledge', from perception (in so far as it goes beyond the passive reception of impressions), through belief and reasoned knowledge, to the understanding of ideals.

The 'knowledge' on the basis of which a doctor prescribes for her/his patient is not reducible to or restricted to cognizance of factual content. The patient may have, and in a sense necessarily has, a better 'knowledge' of the symptoms of the illness than the doctor. But the doctor constructs a conceptual whole in which the cognizance of the symptoms is related to possible causes and to possible effects of certain remedies.

Sense-perception gives us awareness of immediate experience, an immediate presence, a givenness. To yield knowledge it has to be related in a context, and to be related in a context it has first to be distinguished, characterized, conceptualized. Thought gives us knowledge, but it is knowledge of its own product. At the highest level of cognition, in understanding, we return to awareness, but it is the awareness of meaning as meaning, not of a given. Admittedly, I deviate

from Plato's account (I reiterate: my purpose is not to expound, but to philosophize; not to determine what Plato thought, but to think with the help of Plato) in that while Plato says that sense-perception cannot give us knowledge since no statement can be true of something that is constantly changing, I lay the emphasis on the consideration that the given is unintelligible until it is clothed in an idea engendered by the mind. I offer no theory of perception since I regard the question about how perception comes about as one for empirical investigation, and hence as falling outside the domain of philosophy. The theory of perception expounded in the *Theaetetus* (which Cornford maintains must have been Plato's) was a scientific hypothesis. Plato resorts to it here mainly to show that perception, as such, cannot give us knowledge. Only the ideas arising in the mind can give us true knowledge.

VII

Having come to the conclusion that perception cannot be identified with knowledge (186e), the *Theaetetus* turns to the examination of judgement and the claim of judgement to be knowledge. Yet not all judgement; for there is such a thing as false judgement (187a-b); or is there not? Earlier at 167a-b, Socrates, speaking for Protagoras has said that no one can judge falsely, "for it is not possible to think what is not or to think other than what one experiences, and that is always true." In a very significant sense, Protagoras's statement is true. A judgement joins concepts in a certain relation. In so doing it defines the terms of the judgement internally, in relation to each other. It thus creates an ideal whole. That whole is real in itself and in that sense true. We criticize or refute a judgement by showing that it excludes relevant conceptual relationships — 'relevant' meaning of significance to the business in hand, to what is of interest to us. This is a process of evaluation. But my first statement needs qualification to determine what judgements are to be regarded as 'real'. A mere juxtaposition of words is not a judgement; it is an event, not an act of the mind. The cooings of a baby or the sounds produced by a beast may be expressive and in that sense meaningful, but they are not acts on the conceptual plane. They are not judgements, although they may be more truthful by far than much of what fills our academic journals and learned tomes! Intentional lies and trickeries can be treated either as patently bad judgements or as non-judgements because, not being genuinely meant, they do not establish conceptual relations; or we may say that, in the

mind of the liar, they establish highly complex relations of which a significant part is suppressed in the explicit statement.

Perception is infallible. What appears to be in some way is. Opinion is fallible, because what appears true makes a claim that stretches to actualities that are independent of the cognizant agent. Both perception and opinion relate to the phenomenal sphere. In the sphere of pure ideas, what appears true is a meaningful view, possessed of a degree of reality. Just as taste cannot be dubbed right or wrong but may be characterized as wholesome or unwholesome, so a philosophical view cannot be judged true or false, but can be regarded as giving expression to a fuller or more constricted reality.

How can we distinguish between a false statement and a true one, a false belief and a true belief? Subjectively, there is no mark of truth or falsity. Subjectively, we can only speak of a more coherent and more comprehensive view and of one that is less so. So, in the realm of pure thought, we can only have a better and more satisfactory view or one that is inferior and less satisfactory. But when we are concerned with the objective world we can, practically, have criteria and methods of verification. But these are not absolute. They are arbitrary, conventional, pragmatic. If we are in fact duped by Descartes' wicked demon, we cannot say to him, We are wise to your trick, unless, to have his final laugh, he decides to let us know what fools we have been. But even then we can decide to be the ones that laugh last, and say to him, We have truly lived every moment of that illusion.

What Plato terms *allodoxia* – when one mistakes in his mind one thing that is, for another thing that is (189b-c) – is a psychological phenomenon. But when Theaetetus speaks of thinking 'ugly' in place of 'beautiful' he is pointing to something on a different level. Here we have a system of beliefs that can be dubbed false only in a moral sense, but not logically. As Cornford rightly observes (p. 117), Theaetetus' remark points to the forms and thus lies without the scope of the *Theaetetus*.

At the level of thinking as discourse carried by the mind within itself, where the mind makes use of its store of ideas to create new formations (189e-190a), we can speak of error when the formation produced does not agree with a more favoured formation. The one formation by itself cannot be false. The idea of a centaur is not wrong; it is meaningful and valid in the world of fable, but when a boy sets out to find a centaur in the woods, we tell him, That is a different world.

When I see someone approaching and mistake him for Socrates (191b), does that involve a false judgement? The experience can be regarded as an expectation that fails to be fulfilled. Even if, on seeing

the approaching form, I say to myself, 'I will presently see Socrates', then (1) if that is taken in the sense of, 'I believe I will presently see Socrates', the statement is truthful; it can be disappointed, but cannot be falsified; but (2) if taken as a prediction then, as an imaginative possibility, it is neither true nor false in itself but only turns out true or false when the fact materializes. (Cp. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, ch.9, 18a-b, and see my *Let Us Philosophize*, 1998, Bk.II. ch.3 sect.13, pp.150-1.)

I would say that we never make mistakes among our thoughts themselves. Descartes was right; when we operate with clear and distinct ideas we do not err. All error in the realm of ideas is an imperfection remediable by making our ideas more clear and distinct.

No one will think that 11 is 12, but one may take 11 objects to be 12 or think that 5 objects and 7 objects make 11 objects, and these are the cases where verification is applicable and where consequently we can speak of truth and falsity.

VIII

When we came to examine judgement as knowledge we turned our attention first to false judgement. But the argument shows that we were wrong to seek an understanding of false judgement first, for that is impossible before knowing what knowledge is (200c-d).

Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is (true) belief supported by a *logos* (206c). That is what Plato had been saying in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*. What is that *logos*? What is the *logos* that gives understanding? In *Charmides*, Critias, concluding his speech at 164c-165b, says, *nun d' ethelô toutou soi didonai logon*. This may be the first occurrence of *didonai logon* in the dialogues, and it is clear it has no special technical connotation here. It is part of the common speech of the Hellenes and I think it possibly retains this general, non-technical sense throughout the dialogues, even in the *Republic* and in the later critical dialogues. It simply means to justify one's view and support it by reasoning. I do not think that there is anything in the dialogues to indicate that *didonai logon* meant for Plato any specific method or procedure.

In the *Republic* the *logos* that is necessary for true knowledge can possibly be equated with the whole process of dialectic. But still, what we are to understand by that *logos* is not explicitly stated. It may be that Plato, in *Theaetetus* 201c ff., was trying to examine that principle more closely. Does Plato here or anywhere else give a definite answer to the

question? I don't think so: I think the *Republic* remains the most complete expression of Platonism and in the *Republic* dialectic is simply reasoning, *phronêsis*, the free exercise of *nous*.

So, in the end, true 'judgement' accompanied by *logos* does not yield proof or demonstration, but thought that is consistent and coherent. Philosophical truth is more of an aesthetic value: a philosophical viewpoint is good not when it is definitively demonstrable, not when it is irrefutable, but when it is aesthetically satisfactory.

In a long section extending over some five Stephanus pages (201c-206b) a theory that was perhaps current at the time is examined. Since the theory is disposed of in the dialogue, and since we do not know the theory as propounded by its author, this whole section is of historical interest only and we need not concern ourselves with it here.

So what is the upshot of the *Theaetetus*? We might say that when Plato, late in his career, at last poses the direct question: What is knowledge? he ends where the early 'definition' dialogues ended: Any attempt to understand knowledge in terms of anything other than knowledge leads nowhere; the only possible answer is: Knowledge is knowledge: to know is for intelligence to behold the self-evidence of the form or of a configuration of forms constituting a coherent whole, which is nothing but a modulation of the reality of that very intelligence. Knowledge is the radiance of creative intelligence: knowledge is intelligence shining in its own evidence. Like all that is real, knowledge is ultimately a mystery that is not explicable in terms of, or reducible to, anything extraneous to its own self-evident reality. (See chapter 6 of my *Let Us Philosophize*.)

IX

My position has certain points of contact with that of Protagoras (as interpreted by Plato) but also differs from it in fundamental respects, as does that of Plato. Protagoras thought that both sensations and judgements are incontrovertible. As regards sensations, basically my position agrees with that of both Protagoras and Plato. With regard to judgements, I agree with Protagoras in so far as any judgement must be somehow meaningful for whomever holds that judgement. Plato sees in this a pernicious relativism. He shows that a judgement that has a bearing on the future (believing a course of action to be beneficial, for instance), since it has reference to something that lies beyond the immediate thought-content of the judgement, is falsifiable. This refutes Protagoras's doctrine where factual judgements are concerned, and

apparently Plato considers this enough to rid us of Protagorean relativism with regard to judgements as a whole. But what about judgements of value? A Callicles or a Thrasymachus finds wronging others leading to exactly the results he desires; by that criterion his judgements are always true. (They may make mistakes, but Thrasymachus will readily accept that one who makes mistakes deserves to go down the drain; a true superman does not make mistakes.) This kind of relativism is logically unassailable. To combat a Thrasymachus you can only offer the example of a Socrates; to combat a morality of worldly expediency you can only offer the ideal of spiritual wholesomeness and integrity. These ideals are not discoverable facts; are not provable truths: they are prophetic visions to be oracularly proclaimed.

The problem of truth and falsehood, to which whole libraries have been devoted by modern philosophers, is not a problem of philosophy proper. And it is not one problem, but a bundle of problems which call for different approaches: refinement of language, psychological analysis, development of heuristic methodologies, establishment of criteria of verification. Modern discussions are vitiated by their failure to keep these various aspects clearly separate; by readily assuming that in any or all of these approaches what is valid for one area of knowledge or practice must be valid for all such areas; above all by confusing the empirical problem of truth and falsehood with metaphysical questions of reality and value.

In Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, *epistêmê* is just *aisthêsis* (equated with Protagoras's 'man is the measure'), *aisthêsis* is immediate givenness in awareness. This confirms and simultaneously exhausts the whole truth of Protagoras's dictum. Immediate givenness in awareness is *tou ontos* in a true but limited sense. Further discussion shows its insufficiency.

The *Theaetetus* is an explanation and extended vindication of the Platonic distinction between *epistêmê* and *doxa*. The whole sphere of empirical experience is subject to Heraclitian flux and Protagorean relativism. If that were all, there would be no knowledge. To see in the *Theaetetus* a revision of Plato's position in the *Republic* would be completely to fail to understand Plato. In the Platonic corpus, the *Theaetetus* is an appendix to the *Republic*.

For Socrates there was knowledge on the one hand and ignorance on the other hand. That was all he needed for pursuing his mission: to make people acknowledge their ignorance and seek understanding. Plato found that the shadowy region between knowledge and ignorance is not only important for the practical business of living, but in fact

claims much of the attention of seekers after knowledge who are likely to stop at it, believing they have reached their goal. This is so much the case with us today, with our empiricism and scientism and the reduction of philosophy to so many 'scientific' disciplines. In the *Theaetetus* as much as in the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave, Plato meant to show the error of this view.

It is ridiculous to say that in the *Theaetetus* nothing is said of the "doctrine of incorporeal and intelligible forms" (Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, p.247) just because the specific vocabulary of the *Phaedo* is not employed, when we have the affirmation of the reality and of the vital importance of the intelligible order in the plainest language. When a creative writer, who never tires of cautioning us against the deceptiveness of fixed formulations, comes after the lapse of some years to give fresh expression to his position and outlook on fundamental questions, it would be against the nature of things to expect him to use the exact verbal formulations he had used before. The identity of the concepts underneath the words can only be missed by an intellect befuddled by erroneous preconceptions.

X

Let me attempt a recapitulation. Let us give the term 'knowledge' the widest scope possible (in other words, let us use the term most loosely). At the lowest level of the scale we have awareness of a sensation. This is a mere happening, a passive affection. Only when the sensation is distinguished and characterized, that is, when put under a concept, does it become a perception. A perception, like its underlying sensation, cannot be false. When the concepts receive explicit expression through language, (but are there any concepts apart from some language, some symbolic representation?), a perception may be given a wrong name. A child just learning to speak may call a green object red because when first Mama said, "This is red", the child was not looking at the object Mama meant to point out but at something green. This is of no more epistemological significance than that the same object can be called 'red', 'rouge' or 'rot'. When elementary concepts are connected in a statement ('That tree is leafless'), we can have various psychological phenomena: error, illusion, deception. These, whatever their practical importance or their interest for science, are not of any epistemological import (unless you want to speak of an empirical epistemology as a part of psychology). But we can have second-order and third-order concepts. When these are combined with elementary (first-order)

concepts in a statement ('There are nine planets in the solar system'), we have an empirical judgement which can be verified or falsified. This is the domain of science. When only second- or third-order concepts are combined ('Human dignity must be respected', 'A proposition is either true or false'), we have meanings that have their being and reality in a universe of discourse. They cannot be verified or falsified by empirical tests or by logical demonstration. They can only be evaluated in terms of values and ideals we subscribe to (for moral judgements), or in terms of concepts we choose to adopt (for theoretical judgements). That human dignity is an absolute value can be flatly denied and you cannot prove the opponent wrong; you can only say to him, "You are a wretched beast". That a proposition is either true or false is true in Aristotle's logic but not in every logic. Here we are in the domain of philosophy and poetry.

When we are told in the *Sophist* that discourse is the weaving together of forms, *tên allêlôn tôn eidôn sumplekên ho logos gegonen hêmin* (259e), Plato is not merely offering an apt simile, but is giving us a true image of the nature of philosophical thinking. Philosophizing is the formation of an integral landscape by interconnecting ideas.

G. C. Field writes, "The ultimate object of all the activities of the Academy was, at any rate for Plato, to arrive at final philosophical truth" (*Plato and his Contemporaries*, 1930, 1948, p.27). I feel that Plato would strongly object to this formulation, for 'final philosophical truth' is not only beyond human beings, but beyond all finite intelligence. I think that Plato would have preferred to say that the object of the activities at the Academy was to achieve a philosophical temper and frame of mind, for the vision gained at the summit of the philosophical ascent (as described in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*, and again in Epistle VII) is not an intellectual grasping of a truth but an experiencing of a perfection — a perfection that is to be a standard and criterion for our thought henceforward, not a truth that can be formulated or communicated in definitive form.

That understanding which comes from inside us, and only from inside us, cannot be contained in any fixed formulation, and because it cannot be confined in a determinate formulation, any such formulation is necessarily mythical and can be demolished and must be demolished if it is not to turn into a superstition enslaving the mind instead of giving it access to Reality. That, in my view is the gist of Plato's metaphysical epistemology, and that is a lesson we still stand very much in need of grasping. All great philosophers give us views of reality, dream-visions, all valuable, but none that can stand as true. And I maintain that this does not lead to nihilistic relativism because we

have the secure ground we need in the integrity of intelligence, which gives us meaningful conceptions of rationality and of absolute values.

All philosophy that presumes to arrive at and to give expression to definitive truth produces a false conceit of wisdom, *amathia*, that has to be removed by true dialectical philosophy. The most valuable permanent task of philosophy is to demolish, primarily, not error, but truth that gives itself the air of being absolute. The other function of philosophy is to create that which must in its turn submit itself to demolition. The only thing that lasts is the creative activity of intelligence.

Does anybody believe that a book of philosophy can be written – as Spinoza apparently believed it could – by laying down a number of postulates and then extracting deductively definite conclusions? I believe that is a vain dream. Even if the book is written entirely (postulates and all) in the language of symbolic logic, we shall have one of two things: (1) either the symbols are purely algebraic quantities, and then they can be manipulated according to fixed rules and produce conclusions that are formally valid but completely void of meaning; (2) or, if the symbols have any content, they will be found to defy definition, their meanings doggedly and invariably spilling over the boundaries of any definitions, laying themselves open to various creative interpretations.

It may be that Plato at times was lured by the dream of having a science of philosophy. His new dialectic as distinct from the Socratic elenchus was to be the canon regulating that science. Aristotle took this dream seriously. He developed a more articulate canon and applied it in his First Philosophy. Other philosophers throughout all ages had the same dream — Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, the Analytic Philosophy school. That no one has succeeded in establishing a scientific philosophy accepted as such by all competent experts should have convinced them that the dream was a false dream. My own position is that there can be no science of philosophy because philosophy is not concerned with knowledge as knowledge is understood by scientists. Philosophy is a creative activity that produces intelligible universes of its own creation — intelligible simply because they are the product of intelligence. Philosophy does not discover any truths about the world, but sheds intelligibility on the world. Has philosophy then no relevance to the quest for ultimate reality? We find in our own creative intelligence the most perfect reality we can ever encounter, and we assume that ultimately reality must be such, else it cannot be intelligible in any way. Call this an act of faith. It certainly cannot be empirically verified or theoretically demonstrated. What other

alternative do we have? To accept revealed truth? I will not amplify here on the inanity of the idea of revelation; I will only say that to put our trust in revelation is to sell our birthright to rationality. But to hold that what is empirically given is all there is, is to sell our birthright to humanity.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SOPHIST

I

THE *SOPHIST* IS AN OYSTER HOUSING a most rare pearl. On the outside it is an exercise in the method of Collection and Division first described by Plato in the *Phaedrus*. In the course of the exercise the problem of negative statements is raised and is seen to have two dimensions, logical and ontological. The logical problem receives an adequate solution which modern philosophers continue to disregard to their own loss. The treatment of the ontological dimension provides the gem I alluded to.

The *Theaetetus* leads up to the conclusion that, even with the addition of a *logos*, the notion of a particular object cannot give knowledge. The *Sophist* proposes that the addition of a *logos* to a general notion yields knowledge. But what knowledge? It is the knowledge that the Divided Line places in the lower section of the higher plane; it is scientific knowledge. But this is still (*pace* Cornford) not the understanding that dialectic yields.

In the *Phaedrus* we meet with two strains of thought, both relating to knowledge but otherwise belonging to two different worlds and which, except in the theory represented by the image of the Divided Line, Plato never brought into a unified system. On the one hand we have the vision of the forms and the understanding which is born within the soul when touched by dialectic and which cannot be imprisoned in the fixed formulae of language. In the words of Epistle VII (which, whether authentic or spurious, is philosophically genuinely Platonic), "For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself" (Epistle VII, 341c-d, tr. Glenn R. Morrow). On the

other hand we have the method of Collection and Division first mentioned in that dialogue (*Phaedrus*, 264-266), a technique of classification and formal definition which has its primary application in the phenomenal world, and can only be applied to concepts when these are objectified and fixated. The first kind of knowledge is the main concern of the *Republic* and is given the highest rank in the Divided Line; the second belongs properly to the lower level of the higher division.

The method of Collection and Division, in application, works by completely *ad hoc* means, and the validity of the results arrived at can only be judged by pragmatic criteria. It has nothing to do with philosophical thinking or philosophical understanding. The method is unrelated to Socrates' elenchus or to what is improperly called Socrates' 'induction', *epagôgê*. Can anyone take the Division leading to a definition of the Sophist as a rational (I am at a loss for an alternative word) procedure? Is it not an imaginative construction, giving us an imaginative portrayal?

Aristotle tells us in *Metaphysics* XIII.4, 1078b that "two things may be fairly ascribed to Socrates — inductive arguments and universal definition." We are so taken by Aristotle's authority that this contention has passed into an unquestioned article of faith. G. C. Field, for instance, says, "We know that Plato, no doubt inspired by Socrates, attached great importance to the investigation and working out of correct definitions" (*Plato and his Contemporaries*, 1930, 1948, p. 41). No doubt the dialogues show that Plato was intrigued by the question of definitions. But I think that to speak of Socrates as seeking definitions is a misunderstanding. To my mind, Socrates did not seek definitions but the elucidation of ideas and the removal of obscurities and confusions. The instances of elenctic discourse given in the dialogues do not end in definitions, not because it was not possible to find working definitions but because such definitions would not have served Socrates' purpose. They give no understanding, which was the one goal of Socrates. None of the sample definitions given in the dialogues relate to any of the ideas that were of most concern to Socrates. They all deal with either mathematical or physical concepts, which may have been of interest to Plato, but not to the Socrates portrayed by Plato himself in all of the dialogues of the early and the middle periods. Again, I do not think that Socrates' analogical reasonings should be seen as inductive arguments; they can more properly be described in terms of Plato's 'Collection', without the subsequent 'Division' which yields the formal definition.

It is true that in the early dialogues we frequently meet with words for which we can use 'define' or 'definition' in translation, but it is never definition in a technical sense. (For a sampling from a single dialogue, see *Charmides* 163d7 *horisai*, 167e11 *diorizomai*, 171a5 *hōristai*, 171a9 *hōrīsthê*, etc.)

Richard Kraut in his introductory essay to *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (1992, ed. Richard Kraut, p.3) says that the *Republic* gives "definitions of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom". I must disagree. Book One of the *Republic* where a definition of justice is sought ends in *aporia* as in the early 'definition' dialogues. In the rest of the *Republic* Plato constructs a model just state to give us an image of justice. Courage, temperance, and wisdom are all discussed of course, but I cannot see where, either in the *Republic* or elsewhere in the works of Plato, a definition of any of these or of any other moral virtue is offered (apart from the suggestions of the various interlocutors in the 'definition' dialogues, which are invariably found unsatisfactory).

Cornford, comparing Plato's method of Collection and Division with the method of Socrates, says that the latter has two stages. In the first stage the suggestions advanced by the respondent are criticized in the *elenchus*. This stage ends in perplexity, *aporia*. The respondent "is now ready for the co-operative search." Cornford says that the "further inquiry normally proceeds by the same method: a series of suggestions criticised and amended by bringing in fresh considerations." We should observe that this is the selfsame thing we had in the 'first stage'. Cornford then goes on to say, "The end should be the correct definition of the meaning or 'Form' which has all along been coming more clearly into view" (p.184). Against Cornford and most commentators, I maintain that the Socratic method has no second stage. For where in all of Plato's dialogues do we have an instance of such a correct definition? In the *Republic*, after Book One which ends typically in *aporia*, the quest does not proceed by the Socratic method. In the following nine Books 'Socrates' does not examine the opinions of his interlocutors but presents his own view, and to reach a notion of justice, Plato does not resort to critical examination but builds a model and offers an imaginative theory. All of this is proper in its own way. This is what I call the creative part of philosophy. But it is not part of the Socratic *elenchus*, whose sole end is to lead to the *aporia* which induces us to acknowledge our ignorance and to confess that all we can know about justice is that it is by justice that all just acts are just. It is this confessed ignorance that keeps us in living communion with the fount of the

forms that is within us and which is that in us which thrives when we are just and sickens when we are unjust.

When we seek the true meaning of justice by the Socratic method we do not reach any definite formula, but we gain insight. If we try to fix the meaning of the term by Plato's later method, we arrive at a definition serviceable for many practical purposes. People can then use the definition adeptly, but that does not ensure insight into the nature of justice. We can have legislators who can draft useful laws and judges who can pass unobjectionable sentence, who yet in their private lives can perpetrate wrong without having a qualm. Only insight into what constitutes our true worth shored up by the constant restless examination of our ideas – which never yields any definite knowledge – can give us that sense of justice which pricks when we do wrong.

I believe it is futile to seek to find any points of contact between the Socratic method and the method of Collection and Division. This latter is a method for systematizing our knowledge of objective existents. This is the domain of science as distinct from philosophy. Certainly this method gives us the formal definition of genus and differentiae, which some may regard as 'definition' *par excellence*. All the method can do is help us arrange in an orderly and serviceable manner knowledge already in our possession or otherwise accessible to us. It is a methodological technique and has no bearing on the essentials of the theory of knowledge, whatever its practical value may be in various fields of science.

To give a definition of anything is to make it into something parched and bloodless. Only then is it serviceable as a definition. But then it does not reveal the essence of the thing defined. Socrates in explaining to Meno what he is after when he asks about the general character of a thing, gives a sample definition of figure. Elsewhere in the dialogues we have other exemplary definitions. So why can't we have a similar definition of virtue? The reason is that virtue is a reality, a living, vibrant thing which cannot be contained in a fixed formula.

II

It seems that Plato had planned the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philosopher* as model exercises in the method of Collection and Division which he had invented and on which he had set high hopes. But by the time he came to write the *Statesman* he saw that the method was not only imperfect and of less value than, in the first flush of enthusiasm, he had thought, but that it was in fact intrinsically flawed.

He realized that to define the philosopher by that method would perhaps be worse than useless. That may have been the reason, or one reason, why he gave up the idea of writing the *Philosopher*.

If this is so, then perhaps Plato intended the *Statesman* to show the imperfection and limitations of the method of Collection and Division. It is understandable that, when Plato introduced the method, members of the Academy were engrossed in it and expected too much of it. In the *Statesman* Plato does what Socrates did in his elenctic discourses. A definition may be good for a particular purpose, in a particular context, but no definition ever is fully adequate. The difference between the elenctic and the critical dialogues is a superficial one. In the former Socrates showed the insufficiency of the definitions proposed by the interlocutor; in the latter the 'questioner' checks himself, goes again over what he has said, goes back on what he has said. I think that Plato also wanted his readers to see that, even when we have reached an acceptable definition, a practically satisfactory definition, of, say, the Sophist or the Statesman, all we have achieved is an external delineation, a formal classification, which tells us nothing of the inner reality of the thing defined. That is why a definition of the Philosopher by the same method would have been of little use.

The procedure of collection and division from beginning to end moves in the sphere of *eidôla*. Plato could never for a moment have thought it could lead to philosophical understanding. A definition arrived at by the method of collection and division, however exhaustive the collection and however meticulous the division, gives us *doxa* and not *epistêmê*. As the *Theaetetus* has shown, empirical 'knowledge', even when accompanied with *logos*, remains imperfect.

Plato was experimenting with the idea of Collection and Division. It seems clear that he kept changing his conception of the method which was first outlined in the *Phaedrus*. In the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus* his application of the method does not conform to a regular pattern, and it seems to me that he saw that the hopes pinned on it had been exaggerated. At the height of his enthusiasm for the method Plato referred to the method as dialectic. To take this as more than another instance of Plato's well-known insouciance in the matter of terminology would only be confusing.

III

By the time Plato came to write the late group of dialogues, he had realized that the forms, in which all meaning and all value reside, lose

their relevance to our human life unless they are actualized in the here and now. He had come to see the importance for human life of merging the intelligible order and the perceptible order in a united world in theory as they are united in fact.

At 241d5-7 Plato raises the problem of not-being then says: To defend our position, it will be necessary for us to put to the test the doctrine of father Parmenides, and show both that what is not in some way is, and that what is in some way is not, *ton tou patros Parmenidou logon anagkaion hêmin amunomenois estai basanizein, kai biazesthai to te mê on hôs esti kata ti kai to on au palin hôs ouk esti pêi*. This is the whole subject of the *Parmenides* and the principal subject of the *Sophist*. We have to be clear about the meaning of what is, in the sense of what is real. The only coherent conception of what is real is the conception we derive from the reality we find in ourselves as living, intelligent agents. That is the ultimate implication of taking *dunamis* to be the mark of reality. Whitehead was right in finding this notion crucial for a well thought out Platonism.

What was implicit in the *Parmenides* is brought out explicitly in the *Sophist*. But that is not a departure for Plato. The shadows in the cave, the defective knowledge and defective being in the lower portion of the divided line (*Republic*), the unreality and deceptiveness of all that we apprehend through the body (*Phaedo*), the Protean and slippery character of all we try to capture in the elenctic exercise — all that falls within the region of *to mê on*. Plato was only giving fresh, creative expression to the basic insight and outlook of Socrates.

Plato, setting out to determine the meaning of *to on*, finds that the contributions of earlier philosophers (cosmologists and physicists) were no better than old-wives' tales; not because they were myths, for the highest principles and the profoundest insights of philosophy must necessarily be clothed in myth; but, seeking to find reality in the 'outer' world, they could not but be deluded, and Plato simply brushes their endeavours aside. To determine the meaning of reality Plato goes back to the Socratic distinction between the intelligible, which is the realm of reality, and the perceptible, which has only a pseudo-reality borrowed from the intelligible realm. Of the older philosophers, only Parmenides, who identified reality with intelligibility, merits examination, together with the negative teaching of Heraclitus, who saw that the mutable world is unreal and yields no knowledge. All of this Plato had clearly and completely worked out in the *Republic*.

To say that in examining Parmenides' doctrine in the *Sophist* Plato argues about names (Cornford) is to miss the point. In philosophy proper we are not concerned with things but with meanings. To ask

whether we can name the real 'one' or the one 'real', is to ask whether the concept 'one' is the same concept as 'real'. The gist of the *Parmenides*, which is reiterated (or adumbrated) in the *Sophist* is that to think we need a plurality of concepts; but with a completely discrete plurality of concepts we can have no understanding; to understand we need to integrate the plurality into a whole. This is the basis of dialectic. The Stranger in the *Sophist* may not have used what our scholars see as the 'terminology of the theory of forms'; that is neither here nor there: he was all the time using concepts and principles that were fully Platonic.

To counter the materialist outlook, Plato affirms the reality of the intelligible — the intelligible pure and simple, in complete independence of all actuality. He first affirms the reality of the soul, not as an actual thing having the same sort of existence as the body (this having been defined as visible and tangible) but as the power of intelligibility and the realm of the intelligible (246e). There were those who thought of the soul as possessed of some sort of body (247b-c), but for our present purpose it is not necessary to examine this point at length; it is enough if we succeed in making the materialists recognize the reality of ideas (247c-d). He then affirms the reality of the ideas of justice, wisdom, foolishness, and the like, which may qualify a soul by being present to it (247a). (And still our over-erudite scholars confidently assert that the forms are excluded from the *Sophist*.) We should not make too much of the unavoidable spatial metaphors of presence and the like, for all conceptual language borrows from the language of our primary perceptual experiences. Unfortunately, in our day, our hardened empiricists do have the face to assert that justice and wisdom have no place among real things.

The Stranger is careful to emphasize that justice, wisdom, the soul, which are real, are not visible or tangible (247b). The soul is identified with the intelligible. This is the first ground, the starting point of Socrates' philosophy and of Platonism.

At 247b Plato writes: *ousês oun dikaiosunês kai phronêseôs kai tês allês aretês kai tôn enantiôn*, "since justice and intelligence and the other virtues and their opposites are." There are other parallels elsewhere in the dialogues. Can we imagine that Plato, when speaking of forms of injustice, folly, and the like, could have meant that these were anything more than intelligible concepts? In the imaginatively poetic heaven of forms pictured in the *Phaedrus* there is no place for such negative ideas. But Plato surely knew that such negative ideas are pure intelligible forms equally with the positive ideas. They cannot be seen or touched or found anywhere in the phenomenal world. They

arise in the mind, from the mind, and have no being but as tools of understanding.

I do not regard either the first part of the *Parmenides* or the handling of the Friends of the Forms in the *Sophist* as a retraction or revision of any position of Plato's, but as admonitions to 'followers' (and critics), whether members of the Academy or outsiders, who sought to turn Plato's thought ventures into fixed theories, as many since have done and continue to do. Not that Plato did not revise his thinking. He was perpetually doing that. But that is just the point. He continually changed and revised his views, deliberately, on principle, never allowing them to fossilize into dogma and restricting theories. This is one thing Aristotle failed to learn from him.

IV

If the bodiless things we have spoken of and the things which have body are both alike 'real', what do the materialists see as common to both? (247d.) The Stranger suggests that things that are, are no other thing than activity, *ta onta hōs estin ouk allo ti plēn dunamis* (247e). We should note here that the Stranger is speaking of what is common to both invisible and visible things. He equates being real with activity. Being affected is not a negatively passive state, but is an internal adaptation. Here, I believe, Plato is not departing from or altering any position he had held, but is giving explicit expression to an aspect of his philosophy which his habitual language tended to hide. Elsewhere Plato often equates a particular *aretē* with a specific *dunamis*.

I think that this interpretation is fully endorsed by the sequel, for in the ensuing discussion with the Friends of the Forms, we may see Plato correcting a too rigid understanding of what he had been saying or writing about intelligible realities. Not only must the doctrine of the intelligible realm not be constricted within a fixed theory, but, equally, it must have room not only for the indubitable fact of becoming and the pseudo-reality of phenomenal things, but also for the overflowing of Reality in eternal creativity, as Plotinus would realize.

So Plato begins by stating the Idealists' separation of becoming and being, *genesin, tēn de ousian chōris pou dielomenoi lgete*; (248a). Then at 248c he criticizes the rigidly narrow conception of reality as excluding any becoming. The soul, the principle of reality in us, cannot be an inert 'blank' being: the soul knows, understands, loves, gives birth to thoughts and beautiful things, and the soul is our paradigm of Reality. When the Friends of the Forms refuse to acknowledge that

knowledge is an activity (248d), they are shown their error in prophetic words: "But tell me, in heaven's name: are we really to be so easily convinced that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real — that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence?" (248e-249a, tr. Cornford.)

That Cornford after rendering Plato's thought here so precisely and so clearly should try to empty Plato's *dunamis* of all significance can only be due to his unquestioning adherence to the scientific conception of force as a bloodless token.

A. N. Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) says, "It was Plato in his later mood who put forward the suggestion 'and I hold that the definition of being is simply power'." F. M. Cornford, in the Preface to his *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (1935), cites this as an illustration of how "a profound thinker may be misled by a translation." The misleading translation meant was Jowett's, which Whitehead was quoting.

Even a cursory reading of Chapter VIII, "Cosmologies", of Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas* suffices to show that, far from being misled by Jowett's translation, Whitehead's interpretation of the *Sophist* text was part and parcel of his carefully developed doctrine of Immanent Law.

It is instructive to see how Cornford deals in his translation and commentary with the text in which this sentence occurs. The Eleatic Stranger has just sorted out all philosophers into idealists and materialists in the famous Gods and Giants passage of the *Sophist* (245e-246e). He proceeds to show that the materialists' conception of reality is untenable, and that the real (in the widest sense), far from being identical with the visible and tangible, is rather to be equated with activity (*dunamis*).

Contrary to the inveterate fondness on the part of philosophers of the term 'definition', Cornford exerts himself to evade the term in dealing with this statement in the *Sophist*. As rubric for the section 246e-248a he chooses: "A mark of the real is offered for the materialists' acceptance", and in the introductory note he writes, "The argument leads up to a definition – or rather a mark – of the 'real', offered for their acceptance." But the gist of the Stranger's argument with the materialists is to show that all that the materialists regard as real is at bottom nothing but *dunamis*, which was what Whitehead meant and what Cornford wanted to evade. We are not here concerned with a technical or terminological question as to whether the statement amounts formally to a 'definition'. The question is whether the

statement affirms that the essence of all things, including 'material' things, is power.

Plato writes, *tithemai gar horon horizein <dein>, ta onta hōs estin ouk allo ti plēn dunamis* (247e). Jowett's translation, quoted by Whitehead, runs, "... and I hold that the definition of being is simply power". Cornford tries to distance himself as much as possible from Jowett's plain "the definition of being is simply power". He resorts to circumlocution: "I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things," but finds no escape from having to continue, "that they are nothing but power." The Stranger in fact identifies being real with activity; 'being affected' also is not a negative passivity but is an internal adaptation or reaction.

If it is said that this is not in harmony with Plato's insistence on the immutability of the real, I would urge that Plato's emphasis on the eternity and changelessness of reality is meant to put in relief the supra-temporal reality of the intelligible, which, however, does not conflict with or exclude creativity and activity. This is what Whitehead was trying to bring out.

V

As Cornford justly says, "The gist of the Stranger's criticism is that the Friends of Forms have stated their views of reality in terms that are too Eleatic. They have taken changelessness as the mark of Real being, and relegated all change to the world of Becoming" (p.243). With this I agree completely. But when Cornford goes on to say, "The theory of the Friends of Forms is the theory stated in the *Phaedo* and criticised in the *Parmenides*", I must disagree. To my mind, no such theory was 'stated' in the *Phaedo*. The gist of the *Phaedo* is the affirmation of the divinity of the soul as the abode of the intelligible realm. In the first part of the *Parmenides* Plato was examining some ramifications of the concept of participation which he had been tentatively exploring. The principle which Plato took over from Socrates and which formed the foundation of all his thought was that of the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible. When the distinction was seen as a separation, problems ensued. Those incidental problems were the theme of the first part of the *Parmenides*.

In the *Phaedo* the overemphasis on immutability and separateness from the world of becoming was needed to put in the clearest light the concept of eternity. Whitehead sought to correct this by emphasizing the concepts of organism and process. In my version of Platonism I

give prominence to the principle of creativity: for me, the ultimate Reality is Creative Eternity.

In 248a-e the Eleatic Stranger outlines the position of the static idealists with regard to knowledge of reality. While admitting that we commune (*koinônein*) with the real by the soul through reasoning, *dialogismou de psuchêi pros tên ontôs ousian*, they do not concede that such communion involves any activity of being affected by or acting on one another, *pathêma ê poiêma ek dunameôs tinos apo tôn pros allêla suniontôn gignomenon*. They would not accept the Stranger's proposed identification of reality with *dunamis* for fear that in being known, reality would be changed by the act of knowledge (248d-e). The Stranger remonstrates that to refuse to allow change a place in reality amounts to saying that "life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real" and that Reality "has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence" (Cornford's wording). I think this passage vindicates Whitehead's contention that Plato's philosophy is fully compatible with a philosophy of process, a philosophy of organism. This finds further support in the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus*. I would add that we could point out to the advocates of a static Reality (Aristotle or Spinoza no less than the strict Friends of Forms) that life or intelligence, or what has life or intelligence, cannot be known as an object. What has life and intelligence can only be known in active, creative communion of knower and known.

VI

To my mind emergence is a lame notion. It is only superior to reductionist physicalism in that it acknowledges the reality of new qualities. But the new realities cry out for worthier parentage. All reality is and will always remain a mystery. But the notion of creativity gives us a mental vista that lends coherence to the whole process. If the ultimate ground and fount of all that is, is intelligent and good, then the coming into being at a particular time and place of what we term life and mind and spiritual values, becomes, to my mind, comprehensible. I think this is all we can reasonably affirm. For I maintain that, though we can arrive empirically at any amount of factual knowledge, we can only find understanding, intelligibility, in the forms (ideas) created by our own minds — and the only claim these have on validity rests in the luminosity they shed on the givennesses of our experience.

To borrow Spinoza's terminology, while empiricists, reductionists, scientists, find in *natura naturata* all there is, idealists emphasize the reality of *natura naturans*, from which *natura naturata* borrows all the reality it can claim.

Plato states the formal position of the Friends of the Forms (248b10-13) which, like every definite formulation of thought, without exception, leads to error if not subjected to ceaseless examination and correction. He then goes on to show in what way that position calls for correction in the present context – which correction in turn cannot be allowed to assume any finality.

VII

In 249d-251a Plato prepares the ground for dealing with the logical puzzle of the unreal or the non-existent, on which I do not intend to comment here. Thanks to Plato and Aristotle, any schoolchild today can see through the logical puzzle, *pace* our learned academics of the 'new metaphysics' who have been filling tomes with clever dissertations on the existence of Pegassuses and round squares and bald present kings of France. (See my "On What Is Real: An Answer to Quine's 'On What There Is'".) For Plato's treatment of the metaphysical problem of the unreal we have the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the part of the *Sophist* we have just been reviewing. Possibly Plato meant to round off his treatment of the real in the projected *Philosopher*. Whatever were the reasons behind the abandonment of that work, I believe that it would not have substantially altered the account we can gather from the works we have. At one time I suggested that Plato may have dropped the *Philosopher* when he realized that he would simply be repeating what he had already said in the *Republic*.

Without Nothingness there can be no finite, particular, existence. The absolutely positive Being of Parmenides can only be absolutely barren. All particularity implies finitude; all finitude implies nothingness. The finite particular not only presupposes nothingness, but also shares in nothingness. This is not only the lesson of the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, it is also the basis of the Platonic dialectic — not the tamed dialectic of the *Sophist* but the wild dialectic of the *Republic* which recognizes that no determinate formulation of thought can aspire to finality, this being the full fruition of the Socratic Principle of Ignorance, evident in the Socratic elenchus.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE *PHILEBUS*

I

THE *PHILEBUS* BEGINS by stating its formal subject in very clear terms. It is to weigh two opposed views of the good life for humans: on the one hand the view that holds that pleasure, in the widest possible sense, is the good for all animate beings, and on the other hand, the view that knowledge, also in the widest possible sense, is the good for all beings that can have a share in it (11b). The question to be debated is stated so clearly and precisely that to think for a moment that the question relates to the nature of the Good of the *Republic* is simply ridiculous. That Plato finds it possible to move from the discussion of the good life for a human being to the discussion of first principles and ultimate realities is no wonder; how else could it be a philosophical discussion? In the *Republic* we found the quest for the meaning of justice leading to the Good which is beyond being and beyond knowledge.

Indeed, I suppose that Plato's main inducement to devote a dialogue to the question (even if the question was a hotly debated one in the Academy or in the wider Athenian or Hellenic cultural milieu) was that he could use pleasure and knowledge to illustrate the idea of measure and mixture according to measure as the principle underlying all actual realization of positive being, all embodiment of value. In this essay I intend to concentrate on the metaphysical dimensions of the dialogue commenting only cursorily, if at all, on the examination of pleasure.

'Socrates', having stated the issue in dispute very plainly, goes on to raise the problem of the one in the many and from there branches into an ontological classification of all kinds of being before finding his way back to the examination of the claims of pleasure and knowledge.

From 12c-13d we can see that Plato's mind was occupied with the problem of classification and the relation between what, following Aristotle, we have come to call genus and species. But on a deeper

plane this raises the problem of the one and the many (14c) which took for Plato different meanings at different stages of his life. In the *Philebus* Plato's newly heightened interest in logical and methodological questions colours the problem (14c-15c). I think that the metaphysical conception of 'the one in the many' that we find in the *Republic* remained basic to Plato's thought. It expresses the insight that all plurality is only intelligible in a whole. This is also at the foundation of the *Parmenides*.

The difficulties 'Socrates' lists in 15b are just the ones raised by 'Parmenides' in the first part of the dialogue named after him. There they are left unresolved as inherent in the nature of thought and of language. But Plato felt that we cannot leave it at that. Thought probed to the depth is found to be full of ineradicable contradictions. But we are essentially thinking creatures. To live we have to think, and to think systematically and consequentially. Since we are humans and not gods, and have to live as imperfect creatures in an imperfect world, Plato proposed, developed, and experimented with the method of hypotheses, the method of collection and division, the turning of *doxa* to good by the addition of a *logos*, all of which he successively dignified with the title 'dialectic'.

The problem of the one and the many stares us in the face with every sentence we utter (15d). In thought and in speech (two sides of a coin), we necessarily make the one into many. But this is not only a necessity of thought and language. The confused multiplicity which is the stuff of our experience is our actual world. It is not of our making. The multiplicity is there, is given; we make it into one in understanding, then, to give expression to that understanding, we break the one up into a many, which again we have to see as one, demolishing the foundations of our earlier understanding in a higher act of understanding. This is the dialectic of the *Republic*, which the dialectic of the *Philebus* stops short of, not as a failing, but because, for specific purposes, the unending and strictly endless destruction of conceptual foundations demanded by true philosophy, has to end at a given point for a given purpose.

Plato immediately goes on to speak of the misuse of dialectic (15d-16a), as he had done earlier in the *Republic* (538-539). To resolve the difficulty 'Socrates' finds none better than the method to which he has "always been devoted" (16b), "the instrument through which every discovery ever made in the sphere of the arts and sciences has been brought to light" (16c, tr. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure*, 1945). We are told that *hós ex henos men kai pollôn ontôn tôn aei legomenôn einai, peras de kai apeirian en autois sumphuton*

echontôn, "all things ... that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction of Limit and Unlimitedness" (16c9-10, tr. Hackforth). Here we have the intelligible form and the multiple instances renamed Limit and Unlimitedness. So far so good. Then Plato goes on to propose a method of classification, which may be quite good for certain purposes, but which leaves the problem of the relation of the many to the one in the background, untouched. So the method to which 'Socrates' has "always been devoted" and of which we are made to expect so much, turns out to be (16c-e) nothing but a modified version of the method of collection and division, described in the *Phaedrus* and tried out with various fortunes in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. How is the method modified? First, the one and the many here appear under the guise of Limit and Unlimitedness. In my view, the many, the unlimited, the more-and-less, and also the *hupodochê* of the *Timaeus*, all designate the formless givenness which confronts and affronts the mind, which only becomes tamed, redeemed in intelligibility, when taken up into the unity of the form. This is the enlightening work of *noêsis*. The subsequent division is the practical necessary breaking up on the plane of *dianoia*. The second element in the modification consists in freeing the method from the restricting dichotomy exemplified in the *Sophist*, which may be good for a formal classification but is found unserviceable for a broader inquiry, as here.

How can we take the words of 'Socrates' in 16b4-c3 seriously when we find him saying that it is through the method he is about to propound that all the knowledge we have has come to light (*panta gar hosa technês echomena anêurethê pôpote dia tautês phanera gegone*) while we may be certain that Plato knew that neither the advances in mathematics nor his own profoundest insights in metaphysics came about by the method he was about to propound? His own now apparently neglected method of inquiry by hypotheses would have been a better contender for the honour.

II

In the *Philebus* the Unlimited and the Limit are first principles. It does not matter whether Plato had adopted that from Pythagoreanism or from whatever other source. Plato freely adopted ideas that he could weave into an intelligible philosophy wherever he could find them. The provenance of those ideas may be of interest to the historian. To the philosopher that is of negligible significance. In the *Philebus* the

Unlimited is also described as the more-and-less, and what is meant by that is explained very clearly. In the Academy, the Limit and the Unlimited of the more-and-less seem to have been renamed or replaced by the One and the Indefinite (or Indeterminate) Dyad of the great-and-small, as we gather from Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, I.6). The change in nomenclature may have been accompanied by a more marked turn towards a mathematical dressing of the concept. But I don't think either the changed terminology or the prominence of the mathematical aspect was of particular philosophical significance. Be that as it may: as I have repeatedly stated, I am only interested in the philosophy I find in the dialogues Plato left us, and for the time being at least I do not intend to engage in speculation about what either Plato or others may have made of the Indefinite Dyad in the Academy.

Then Plato comes as close as possible to making a clean breast of it and telling us frankly that the whole debate between pleasure and knowledge has been a pretext for displaying certain metaphysical principles and notions. 'Socrates' suddenly 'remembers' something he had heard, or maybe he had dreamed (20b) — that the good life for a human being is neither a life of pleasure bereft of intelligence nor a life of intelligence devoid of any enjoyment. This would have been the tritest of platitudes if it were not in its turn a pretext for the presentation of measured mixture as the principle underlying all actualized value; and this again is an application of the unity of Limit and Unlimitedness as the foundation of all positive value. Plato had his philosophy fully ripe and mellow in the *Republic*: all he has been giving us in later dialogues is the same fruit in a variety of dressings.

Then we have a further leap into the aether of pure ideas, and we have a 'classification' which is not a classification but a creative articulation of forms of being. 'Socrates' proposes to make "of all that now exists in the universe" a twofold division, but in the same breath adds "or threefold". Further on we will end up with a fourfold division. We begin with the Unlimited and the Limit as in our first two divisions. The mixture of these two gives us our third division, and the cause of the mixing brings the number up to four (23c-d). Clearly this has nothing to do with the method of Collection and Division.

The fourfold classification of all being introduced in the *Philebus*, seems to have been, like the *megista genê* of the *Sophist*, another of Plato's occasional hobbyhorses. He would have an idea, work on it or with it enthusiastically for a time, then neglect it. Such was the method of hypotheses, the method of collection and division, the *megista genê* — and I suppose that the Limit and Unlimited, the One and the Indefinite Dyad were also such. And I imagine that each of these found

a following among members of the Academy who would ride their hobbyhorses to death.

III

But Collection and Division is still in the background of Plato's mind. He proposes that we take two of our four divisions, breaking them up into many, and then collecting them again into one (23e). Let us see how.

We take up the Unlimited to see in what sense it is a many. We do not subject it to any systematic partition as in the method of Collection and Division, but find that it has the manifoldity in its very nature, and its manifoldity turns out to be not a multiplicity of discrete entities, but a slippery formlessness that we can characterize by nothing more fixable than a more-and-less, which is boundless and unlimited (24a-b). Then we find that there are many such Unlimiteds, all things of which we can speak as more and less, larger and smaller, hotter and colder, are instances of the Unlimited. All things which admit of number and arithmetical notions come under the Limit (24c-25b). So here we were not dividing but collecting, and after the collection we do not proceed to a division. My feeling is that Plato was experimenting, exploring uncharted territory.

Then we go looking for the third form, the mixture, and learn that "it is here that we find the source of fair weather and all other beautiful things, namely in a mixture of the unlimited with that which has limit" (26b, tr. Hackforth). There is not even a pretence of systematic derivation. The notion of measured mixture, proper balance, as the source of health, fair weather, and all beautiful and good things, is simply offered as the gift of a god. I cannot refrain from saying that here we have a good exemplification of what I mean by saying that philosophy is the oracular proclamation of creative notions that produce intelligibility.

In my own philosophy the Limit and the Unlimited appear as intelligence imposing intelligible patterns (form) on formless givenness (existence), which is the necessary objectification of intelligence. Sheer existence which is meaningless and as such has no reality, obtains reality in the intelligible pattern. This is *genesis eis ousian*: all actuality is the offspring of intelligence and the givenness of formless existence, *to toutôn ekgonon* (26d).

Now for our fourth form. *Genesis* calls for a cause. And here we come upon another oracular proclamation: *oukoun hê tou poiountos*

phusis ouden plên onomati tês aitias diapherei, to de poioun kai to aition orthôs an eiê legomenon hen; "Well, is there anything more than a verbal difference between a cause and a maker? Wouldn't it be proper to call that which makes things and that which causes them one and the same?" (26e, tr. Hackforth.) Only in intelligence can becoming be intelligible. Our 'scientific' (truly irrational) belief in 'objective', 'natural', causes, when taken as anything more than a useful fiction, is utterly pernicious. It precludes all genuine understanding.

'Socrates' goes on to affirm that "the sum of things or what we call this universe ... is governed by Reason and a wondrous regulating Intelligence" (28d, tr. Hackforth), and at 29a-30d I think we can detect Plato already planning the *Timaeus*.

IV

Throughout the *Philebus*, 'the good' is the good for man, what makes for a happy life, as Socrates clearly states at the beginning of the discussion: "What you and I are now to attempt is to put forward a certain state or condition of the soul which can render the life of every man a happy life" (1d, tr. Hackforth).

I find it unthinkable that anyone should have thought of identifying the 'good' of which it is inquired in the *Philebus* whether it is pleasure or knowledge with the Form of the Good. The idea is just absurd. The good in the *Philebus* is simply the practical good that ordinary human beings should aim at in their quotidian lives. In the *Republic* when, after Socrates has spoken of the Good in such inspired language and has said of it that it is beyond Being and beyond Knowledge, the question is thrice thrown in whether this Good is to be identified with pleasure or thought (505b, 506b, 509a), I can only see that as a bitter gibe on the part of Plato against certain callous persons, whether in the Academy or elsewhere, who had the stupidity to raise the question. There the question is waived aside as too trite. But it may be that Plato, finding the claims of pleasure and knowledge to being the good to be sought by humans hotly debated in some quarter or another, thought he might clarify the issue in a dialogue and at the same time make it an occasion for examining some profounder questions.

It is also wrong, I think, to describe the *Philebus* as a 'Socratic dialogue'. It is not an elenctic discourse and the treatment of pleasure in it is not Socratic. The moral interest and the ideal of life in it are of course true to Socrates, but this is to be expected since Plato of course always remained true to Socrates' moral ideals and principles.

The introductory discussion between Socrates and Protarchus shows clearly that the debate between the life of pleasure and the life of intelligence cannot be settled by logical argument. Socrates is formally in the right when he maintains that the admission that all pleasures as pleasures are the same does not permit Protarchus to add that all pleasure is good. But Protarchus is also right in asserting that one who takes as his starting point the premiss that pleasure as such is good cannot be expected to admit that some pleasures are good and some are bad. The positions of Socrates and of Philebus are two opposed world views: they are strictly incommensurate. Neither is amenable to proof in language intelligible to the other or to refutation in terms of the language of the other. This was so in the case of Callicles; it was so in the case of Thrasymachus (not an advocate of pleasure but of power); it is so in the case of Philebus. Socrates can continue the discussion with Protarchus because he is not a Callicles but rather a Polus and is not an out-and-out hedonist.

In the *Laws* Plato attempts to argue for the superiority of a life of temperance, wisdom, courage, and health over the opposite life on the ground that the former has a preponderance of pleasure over pain (732d-734e). In my opinion, the argument there only succeeds in showing the futility of all such arguments.

V

I do not intend to comment in detail on the examination of pleasure from 31b onwards. I will only give expression to a passing thought or reflection here or there.

Throughout the *Gorgias* but especially in the argument with Polus, pleasure is clearly opposed to the good. To take pleasure as the criterion or the goal of the good life is the mark of folly. This does not contradict the position of Socrates in the *Protagoras*. There pleasure is taken as the hypothetical end of action in a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of acting against one's better judgement (*akrasia*). There is no contradiction in what we find about pleasure in the various works of Plato. There may have been (must have been) temperamental differences between Socrates' and Plato's attitudes regarding pleasure, and there are certainly differences of mood between works of Plato written at different times. To expect otherwise would be unrealistic. But there are no contradictions or irreconcilable differences.

At 31b 'Socrates' says that we cannot examine pleasure adequately apart from pain. In the *Laws* we read: "For pain and pleasure are, as it

were, nature's twin fountain-heads; whoso draws from the right fount, at due times, and in due measure, be it city, or person, or any living creature, is happy, but he that draws without science, and out of due season, has the clean contrary lot" (636d-e tr. A. E. Taylor). This is a thought that we can trace back to Socrates' 'Aesopian' fable in the *Phaedo* (60b-c).

'Socrates' then says that we find pleasure and pain in the common (*koinôî*) kind, and when asked what kind he is referring to by that term, it turns out to be our old third kind, the one in which we have put health and harmony, the mixed kind.

'Socrates' having suggested that one who has chosen the life of reason and intelligence may live unperturbed by either pleasure or pain, and that such a life may indeed be, of all lives, the most godlike, Protarchus agrees emphatically: "Certainly it is not to be supposed that the gods feel either pleasure or its opposite" (33b, tr. Hackforth). This is so Platonic. Spinoza was to express the same sentiment. And of course, if we restrict pleasure and pain to the feelings accompanying bodily processes, then a being of pure intelligence, if there could be any such, would experience neither pleasure nor pain. But if intelligence is necessarily and essentially creative, then a being of pure intelligence would enjoy a life of exuberantly joyful creativity. Even Aristotle's God, if it were not condemned to motionless inactivity, would enjoy a pleasant life.

At 34c-35d by a lengthy and careful analysis Plato shows that desire belongs not to the body but to the soul and that "our bodies cannot possibly feel thirst or hunger or anything of that sort". This is an improvement and a correction not of the philosophy but of the psychology of the *Phaedo* — a correction which was first introduced in the *Republic*, though unfortunately there it was vitiated by the view that the various 'parts' of the soul have their peculiar desires. In commenting on that passage of the *Republic* (430e-431b) I maintained that the Socratic view that even in the case of bad choice (*akrasia*) it was the mind that dictated the choice was the superior view.

The long analysis of the mixture of pleasure and pain which pertains to the soul alone (47d-50c) shows that Plato at the time was much attached to the method of division. Possibly he found it of great help in teaching. But as the specimen here clearly shows, it was not a division that adhered to any strict rules. The division proceeds on one principle then shifts to another. As displayed here we may regard it as a development of Prodicus's drawing of distinctions, freed, may be, of whimsicality and arbitrariness.

VI

In his late period, the problem of Being and Becoming was constantly in the focus of Plato's thought. We can see this in *Philebus* 53d-54a. The very playfulness with which Plato introduces the erotic theme here shows, in my view, that he has in mind the mystic vision of the whole of the world of becoming aspiring to fulfilment in the eternity of true Being.

I see this in relation to the principle of *tokos en kalôi*, giving birth in beauty, introduced in the *Symposium*, which is for Plato a metaphysical and cosmic principle of the first order. For Plato *tokos en kalôi* first expresses itself in biological procreation but takes us all along the ascent to the highest good. It is this same *tokos en kalôi* that we find in the ascent to the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, that we find in the beatific vision of the myth of the *Phaedrus*, that informs the whole of the *Phaedo*, that is behind the dynamism of the *Sophist*, the creativism of the *Timaeus*.

The beautiful, a form of perfection, embraced in intelligence, finds creative expression in the generation of other perfection. Reality is active and creative. This is what Plato came to emphasize in the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*. But that was not a revolution in his thought. The seed had always been there; in time it had opportunity and scope to germinate. – This is not unrelated to Plato's view of 'inspiration' in the *Ion* and elsewhere.

The desire for eternity inherent in the desire to *tokein en kalôi* is not a desire for temporal longevity or temporal permanence, but a desire for the eternity of the creative moment.

VII

What Plato has to say of dialectic (*hê tou dialegesthai dunamis*) in *Philebus* 57e-59c adds nothing to what we can learn from the *Republic*. Both the tone and the content of this passage in the *Philebus* suggest it was addressed to some controversy within the Academy.

At 61a1-2, summing up the outcome of the contest between pleasure and knowledge, 'Socrates' says, *oukoun to ge teleon kai pasin hairaton kai to pantapasin agathon oudeteron an toutôn eiê*; "Then the final and for everybody electable and altogether good would be neither of these?" Hackforth here translates: "Then neither of the two can be the perfect thing that everyone desires, the absolute Good." The use of the word 'absolute' conjoined with the capitalization of 'Good' is needlessly

misleading. The misleading rendering continues in the following lines with "grasp the Good" and "a way towards the Good", when it is quite clear that the good 'Socrates' is speaking of is to be found in a life enjoying a good mix of pleasure and intelligence (61a-c). There is no question here of the highest Good, which is the ultimate Reality in the *Republic*.

The cryptic passage in *Philebus* 64a-c which Hackforth finds puzzling is vintage Plato. In the *Philebus* as a whole we have been dealing with things human, with pleasure and intellect and happiness and goodness as they are in the here and now, in the world of becoming. Plato throws in a hint to remind us that all of that can have no substance, can be no more than a dream, if we do not connect it to Reality (*alêtheia*) on the metaphysical plane. If we do, then, and only then, would our life and the good things in our life be real.

When at 64c 'Socrates' speaks of standing at the front-door of the dwelling of the good, he has returned to the good life for humans, and Hackforth's translation has once more to be taken with circumspection.

VIII

It is wrong to try to force the various presentations by Plato of any given notion into strict formal conformity with each other. Thus scholars try in vain to forge Plato's various descriptions or applications of the method of collection and division into a consistent account. I think that Plato never had a streamlined version of the method. That is the reason why our scholars, with all their erudition and their enviable diligence, cannot come up with an agreed account of the method.

To give some substance to the above remarks, let us have a look at a page of text, *Philebus* 23c-24b. In 23c we divide all things in the universe into two; no, rather three; well, let us add a fourth; we might also need a fifth. Clearly this is not division as understood in the method of Collection and Division. God has revealed to us the idea of the Unlimited and the Limit, or 'Socrates' may have dreamed it: the idea is a creative insight, it could not be derived by a logical process from any antecedents. Neither could we find it in the givennesses of experience. Of course, all distinctions we make we can easily find in the world — once we have put them there. They become inseparable of the way we see things. Then in 23e Plato gives us a mixture of this special 'division' with the methodical division: we are to see how each of the Unlimited and the Limit is "split into many and torn apart" and then collected again into one. At 24a the Unlimited is a many. But

immediately following that we see it as essentially an undivided continuum. It is and it is not the Many, the Dyad, the Infinite, the formless *hupodochê*. — What I have written here is not a criticism of Plato: my purpose is to show that it is futile to try to find a set system in the writings of Plato. Plato is the poet and artist of thought: he gives us kaleidoscopic visions of Reality — a Reality that refuses to be imprisoned in one mould.

Hackforth points out (Introduction, p.3) the similarity of "the opposition of Unlimited and Limit in the *Philebus* and that of pre-cosmic chaos and the *eidê kai arithmoi* □ by which it is ordered in the *Timaeus*." So we can see that the Unlimited and Limit, the chaos and the forms and numbers, the Indefinite Dyad and the One, are various formulations of the basic thought of the One in the Many which we find in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*. Plato, true to his genius, knew that no linguistic formulation is ever adequate to reality. In the *Republic* he gives us the allegory of the Cave, the divided line, the Sun simile, to express one fundamental thought. In trying to relate the intelligible forms to the multiple particular instances in which they are manifested (of which the One in the Many is only a variant expression), he speaks of participation, association, imitation, and so on, and then in the *Parmenides* he finds all of these modes of expression unsatisfactory. The Indefinite Dyad – which does not appear in the dialogues – seems to be a particular application of the idea of Limit and Unlimited, the one and the many. Like the Unlimited of more-and-less the Indefinite Dyad is a continuum. As such it is unlimited and unintelligible. To be intelligible it has to be subjected to the limitation of number. If the One and the Indefinite Dyad version was for a time the craze in the Academy, what wonder? All the mystification, ancient and modern, that has been raised around this question, is mere chaff.

The explanation given by 'Socrates' of the discovery of the concept of an alphabetical letter by the Egyptian Teuth (18b6-d2) is a very good illustration of the creative act of the mind by which meaningfulness is infused into the multiple. The creation of the idea of a letter, which any linguist knows is utterly artificial, gives the inarticulate stream of sounds intelligibility and brings into existence written language. The same stream of sounds when heard only becomes intelligible when the mind breaks it up into distinct words. This is only a special case of the imposing of form by the mind on the unintelligible given whereby it becomes intelligible. This, I take it, is the original meaning of the original Socratic conception of the intelligible; this is the essential core of the doctrine of reminiscence and of the Socratic maieutic. It is a pity that Plato in his later years chose to yoke the idea to his newly-found

method of collection and division, a method which could have served the scientific interests of an Aristotle but not the mathematical, astronomical, or philosophical interests of a Plato, not to speak of the moral interests of a Socrates.

Putting aside the division of pleasure, which he had promised, 'Socrates' goes back to the idea of the Limit and the Unlimited and proposes to apply the method of division there (23c-26d). It turns out to be a division that is quite unlike anything that the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, or the *Statesman* would lead us to expect. The collection, on the other hand, is seen to be the projection of a unity that gives intelligibility to the formless many; in other words, it is the generation of form. Plato was out for new conceptual tools to represent the eternal tug of war between the One and the Many, Being and Becoming, the stability of the intelligible and the mutability of the objective world. It was yet another of his endless experimentations, and the tentative character is stamped all over it. In introducing the idea of the *meikton* as the product of the Limit and the More-and-Less (*to mallon te kai hêtton*), he mixes it with the idea of measure as the source of all that is fine. In so doing he deprives the Limit of its universality. Heat is unlimited; any given degree of temperature is a *meikton*; but then 300 degrees Celsius is as good a *meikton* as 30 degrees; yet it is not the 'measure' to give us fair weather. Obviously Plato's preoccupation with moral considerations was here predominant. Whatever may have been the fate of the new idea in the Academy, I do not think that Plato remained satisfied with it for long. He was always casting for new ideas, and never satisfied with any for long; that is the measure of his genius. When we take hold of a particular idea, theory, doctrine, or what not, and try to give it a fixity that its creator never intended, we are sacrificing what is most valuable, the underlying insight that can be glimpsed, beheld, in the living movement of thought, but can never be imprisoned in any inflexible theory or doctrine. That is the truth behind Plato's insistence that his profoundest thought cannot be confined in any writing, not the esotericism that Szlezak and other modern scholars ascribe to him.

After making all becoming the outcome of the mixing of the Limit and the Unlimited, then adding the resultant mixture as a third principle, Plato is unhappy. With reason. If we were to stop there we would be joining the innumerable horde of reductionists, ancient and modern. We give a good account of becoming, then list the elements that went into our objective account. But Plato knew that that would not do. So he brings in the intelligence behind it all as a fourth principle. In truth, only the whole creative act is properly intelligible. We can break

it up, conceptually, in many ways, to serve various purposes. We rest with the fragments to our detriment, as would-be philosophers and scientists have done and continue to do.

Burnet poses the question, To which of the 'kinds' of the *Philebus* do the forms belong?, and says that the difficulty in finding an answer to this question arises "from the fact that Plato refrains from giving his full doctrine on the subject in this dialogue" (*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, 1914, p.332). Not so, in my opinion. Plato does not 'refrain' from giving his 'full doctrine': he does not give it because he never had a 'full doctrine'; and he never had a 'full doctrine' because he knew that no 'full doctrine' can ever be adequate to reality. Plato never gives us, neither on this nor on any other question, a 'finished' doctrine, because he knew that that would be the death of philosophy. I chose to comment on Burnet's statement on this fundamental plane because this goes to the very heart of philosophy. But I see no difficulty in answering the question: the forms not only belong to the Limit; they are identical with the Limit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE TIMAEUS

I

THE *TIMAEUS* PURPORTS TO GIVE an account of the coming into being of the universe up to the creation of humans. But before we are alerted to that intention we go through a curious prelude in which Socrates gives a summary of a discussion supposedly held the previous day. The summary turns out to be an outline of the model state described in Books II-V of the *Republic*. Socrates says he would like to hear someone give an account of that model city "carrying on a struggle against her neighbours, and how she went out to war in a becoming manner" (19c, tr. Jowett). Critias is ready to oblige with a story related to Solon by Egyptian priests, telling of a mighty struggle carried out by Athens against Atlantis nine thousand years before the time of Solon. Critias gives a preliminary outline of the story which he is to tell in detail the following day — the subject of the unfinished *Critias*.

The sketch given by Socrates of the model city described in the *Republic* has led scholars to all sorts of wild speculation. John Burnet, noting that the sketch does not cover the contents of Books VI and VII, says, "This can only mean that the *Timaeus* and its projected sequels were intended to replace in some way the later books of the *Republic*" (*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, 1914, p.339). I find this simply incredible. To me, the philosophy of Books VI and VII is the very heart of Platonism. We find that philosophy fully alive not only in the *Sophist*, *Philebus*, and *Timaeus*, but also throughout the *Laws* and particularly in the last three books; it was the model city of the *Republic* that was "replaced" in the *Laws*, not the *Republic* philosophy of knowledge and reality.

Plato apparently invented a "previous day's discussion" to prepare the way for the *Critias*. He needed to outline an imaginary ideal state for the purpose and found the one he had invented for the *Republic*

handy and used it. There is no reason to suppose that he wanted this to recall his earlier *opus* as such.

II

Cosmologies were the earliest products of the speculative ventures of the human mind. All primitive cultures, all ancient civilizations, had their cosmologies or cosmogonical myths. The earliest Ionian thinkers were all cosmologists. Socrates had his own good reasons for renouncing that game. The problems that were the whole of Socrates' concern, were for Plato also the problems of first and foremost importance. But Plato saw no harm in exercising his thought and imagination in the construction of a cosmology, provided that the confines of the exercise were clearly defined. Thus he makes Timaeus, before giving his exposition, first remind us of the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible (27e-28a), and then warn us that a description of a mere likeness will be merely likely; for being has to becoming the same relation as truth to belief (29c). He continues, "You must be satisfied if our account is as likely as any, ... and should not look for anything more than a likely story in such matters" (29c-d. tr. Desmond Lee). All of this is strictly in conformity with the teaching of the *Republic* concerning knowledge and reality: we are here moving within the lower section of the higher division of the divided line. All 'scientific knowledge', all factual knowledge about the world, is, according to Plato, confined within that region. It is worth noting that, in the same passage, after being told that "a description of what is changeless, fixed and clearly intelligible will be changeless and fixed", we find this immediately qualified by: "will be, that is, as irrefutable and uncontrovertible as a description in words can be" (29b-c., tr. Desmond Lee), which again is in full agreement with the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the Seventh Epistle.

Perhaps what moved Plato to venture into the uncertain regions of cosmology was the same feeling that inspired the whole of Plotinus's thought, the same that dictated Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, the same that prompted all builders of grand metaphysical systems, which I may put in these words: We are part of the All, and we cannot ourselves be whole, unless we see ourselves in the All.

At the beginning of his introductory speech, Timaeus succinctly recapitulates the position of the *Republic* on knowledge and reality: "In my view, we have first to make the distinction between what always has being and is not subject to becoming and that which is always

becoming and never has being. The one is intelligible, attainable by reason, and is always the same; the other is apprehended by unreasoning sensation, is matter of conjecture, becoming and perishing, but never truly having being" (27d5-28a4). This at once puts the whole discussion of the *Timaeus* in its proper frame. Plato never rescinds Socrates' renunciation of physical inquiry in the *Phaedo* 'autobiography'. So Timaeus concludes his preliminary speech by warning Socrates that he should not expect anything more than 'a likely *muthos*' (29d).

Here in these few words we have, all woven together, Socrates' radical distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible, Plato's conjunction of levels of intelligibility with planes or degrees of reality, and the ground-principle of Platonic metaphysics, the opposition between reality and ephemeral existence. Plato has again and again been telling us that only what is fully real is knowable in the proper sense and that what is always becoming can only be the object of opinion and conjecture, and here he reiterates this in the clearest terms. So at the very outset Plato warns us that the cosmology into which we are about to venture cannot be the object of proper knowledge.

Timaeus explicitly admonishes, "Don't therefore be surprised, Socrates, if on many matters concerning the gods and the whole world of change we are unable in every respect and on every occasion to render a consistent and accurate account. ... both you and I ... are merely human ... and should not look for anything more than a likely story in such matters" (29c-d, tr. Lee). All that we know about the world – even about the most relatively consistent and constant aspects of the world – can never be anything more than a likely story, *hōste peri toutōn ton eikota muthon apodechomenous prepei toutou mēden eti peri zêtein*, so that having accepted the tale as likely, we should not inquire any further (29d). This is a fundamental principle of Platonism that we badly need to grasp.

In 51b6-e6 Plato takes up once more the contest between the materialist and the idealist conception of reality that he had represented in the *Sophist* as the battle of the Gods and the Giants. The case is in fact rooted in the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible, which reappears in the *Republic* in the form of the contrast between the realm of reality and the realm of shadows, pictured graphically in the allegory of the Cave, and again in the distinction between *epistēmē* and *doxa*, represented in the Divided Line. So when Plato here grounds the reality of the intelligible forms on the distinction between 'knowledge' and 'opinion', he is reaffirming the *Republic* distinction between all empirical knowledge on the one hand and

rational understanding on the other hand. Here also we can see clearly that in Plato's thought it is impossible to separate the epistemological strain from the metaphysical strain. It is also clear that, while Plato certainly developed the Socratic insight, he never departed from it.

III

The insight given explicit expression in the *Sophist*, that the real must be living and intelligent, comes to full flower in the *Timaeus*. In 29d7-31b3 we have the One of Parmenides endowed with life and intelligence.

For Socrates *nous* is what makes us human beings what we are and gives us our worth. Plato takes that to the metaphysical plane: *nous* is what makes the cosmos what it is and renders all being and all becoming intelligible. It is misleading to translate *aitia* in Plato by 'cause'. 'Cause', in scientific thinking, denotes a state of affairs that precedes another. In the *Philebus* 26e Plato says that the *aitia* and the 'maker' are two names for the same thing. Also, that which is made and that which comes to be are two names for the same thing (*Philebus*, 27a).

At 28a4-6 Timaeus says, *pan de au to gignomenon hup' aitiou tinos ex anagkês gignesthai` panti gar adunaton chôris aitiou genesin schein*, which I would translate: "All that becomes necessarily becomes by some agency; it is not possible apart from some agency for anything to come into being." Lee translates: "In addition, everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause; for nothing can come to be without a cause." Jowett's translation is truer to the spirit of Plato's text: "Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created." We have to be very careful not to read into Plato's words our own scientific conception of causation. Plato goes on to contrast producing something on the pattern of the unchanging with producing something on the pattern of the changing. This should alert us to the radically different perspective from which Plato looks at the question of causation. For Plato as for Socrates *aitia* was not an extraneous 'cause' but an intelligent motive, a reason why: we might say 'purpose', provided we keep in mind that it is not a purpose exterior to the act but the expression of a purposiveness inherent in the act. This is what I call the principle of creativity.

Becoming (any event) is not 'explained' (as our scientists think) by a description, however thorough, of a state of affairs that precedes it, but

by a reason that reveals the event as a creative affirmation of the whole (the reality) of which the preceding state of affairs was only the objective manifestation. (As often, I may be going beyond Plato: why else should I write if I have nothing to contribute? But I do not go against Plato here. Where I do go against Plato, as on the question of personal survival for instance, I say so plainly.)

The idea of cause is a creation of the mind. Kant only weakened the Socratic insight that the ideas which constitute the intelligible realm are bred by the mind when he separated reason from the totality of the act of intelligence and then went on to distinguish reason from other faculties (understanding, sensibility) and furthermore to break up reason itself into speculative and practical. Intelligence is the one reality we know. Plato's divided line does not institute separate faculties but indicates different levels of the perfection of intelligence.

The idea of 'cause' as commonly understood must be the most hoary of all the fictions of reason, and it is so firmly entrenched in our mind that it seems beyond challenge. It must have been among the earliest of the creations of *homo sapiens* and has doubtless stood the race in good stead, for humans could not have started on the long course of manipulating nature without this tool. But it's time that we see through the illusion, useful and indispensable for the business of living as it is. No origination becoming has a cause. It has an occasion, a ground, a fount, what you will. The occasion creatively unfolds itself. Ask a poet, ask a lover. This idea of course does not help us get things done in the world. But the importation of the fiction of causation into philosophy has riddled philosophers with endless pseudo-problems, which can never be solved, but can readily be resolved through the notion of creativity. Becoming is a mystery that only becomes intelligible in the light of the principle of creativity.

IV

J. B. Skemp, in his translation of the *Statesman*, commenting on *Timaeus* 33b-c describing the animate body of the world, says, "Here we come upon early anthropomorphic thinking about the universe" (p.87). To stop at the anthropomorphic character of the account is to devalue Plato's thought. The anthropomorphism, whatever may have been its ancestry, was in Plato consciously mythical, but the insight embodied in it was profoundly metaphysical, or, as I prefer to put it, prophetic. It offers a view of an intelligent, living universe.

At 34a8-b9 we have the perfectly rounded One of Parmenides summed up in a manner with which the venerable Eleatic could find no fault, but with a difference that makes all the difference; for this is a created One. Even its intelligible 'model' cannot be equated with ultimate reality. Though Plato, in the *muthos*, does not spell out the relation of the Maker to the model, I think it would only be consistent with Plato's whole outlook to see ultimate reality as the Good, the active, creative Good, whose intelligent goodness affirms itself naturally and necessarily in creation. This is Plotinus and Spinoza in one. Plotinus did not falsify Plato's thought but gave it original mythical expression. Spinoza's system, too, is mythical: only when we see it as such can we arrive at its essence and find the speciousness of its geometrical demonstration redeemed in the underlying vision it offers.

Timaeus next proceeds to state why the framer of this universe of change framed it at all. "He was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all things to be as like himself as possible" (29d-e, tr. Lee). The *Timaeus* clearly advances the principle of creativity. The *dēmiourgos* created the world because, in his goodness, he wanted to propagate that goodness. The goodness of the ultimate Good is overflowing, it affirms itself in creative giving, in love. In my boyhood, I put down an outline of the system I had formed in my mind. As far as I remember, I put down the outline in 60 numbered points, which concluded that in the final analysis the origin of the coming to be of all that is, is a will; will is purposive, and purpose is love. Hence I concluded that ultimate Reality is Love. I find the same thought in what Plato says here. The maker of the world was good, and because he was good he wanted all things to be good. The only way the coming of the world into being can be found intelligible is to conceive the ultimate origin of all things as a creative force that is intelligent and good. But I do not see this creativity as creation by a transcendent creator; it is a creativity that unfolds and moulds its own being. As Plato adds, *tautên dê geneseôs kai kosmou malist' an tis archên kuriôtatên par' andrôn phronimôn apodechomenos orthotata apodechoit' an*, "This is as valid a principle for the origin of the world of change as we shall discover from the wisdom of man, and we should accept it" (29e-30a, tr. Desmond Lee).

"God therefore ... finding the visible universe in a state not of rest but of inharmonious and disorderly motion, reduced it to order from disorder ..." (30a, tr. Lee). Here we have to tarry at two points. If ultimate reality were a Parmenidean simple, undifferentiated being, there could be no explanation of the coming to be of anything at all.

There must be something over against the perfect being of the One. Plato chooses to see that something as an independently existing chaotic world. Perhaps this is due to Plato's temperamental attachment to the simple and changeless. But then that leaves us with the problem of the source or origin of that chaotic world. I see that as the dimension of existence (the bare, brute givenness of being), opposed to the dimension of reality, these being two dimensions of the ultimate creative intelligence which I also name Creative Eternity. This is the view I put forward in Book Two of *Let Us Philosophize*.

Plato's language (for instance at 27e5-28a1) may suggest that his attitude towards change and becoming remained ambivalent even though he came in the later dialogues to emphasize life and intelligence and activity as essential features of reality. But when he says that "that which is immovably the same for ever cannot become older or younger by time; nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future; nor is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause" (38a, tr. Jowett) — we should be able to understand him better. Only the transient actuality is in time and subject to the Heraclitian flux; the creative intelligence apart from which the actuality has no being whatever is in itself supra-temporal. If the creative intelligence were itself mutable, there would be no reality and no being at all: we would have Berkeley's ideas minus God, which is an impossibility. The whole passage, 37c6-38b5, puts the problem of time and eternity in the best light. Did Augustine have this passage in mind when he dealt with the problem of time in the eleventh book of the *Confessions*?

V

When we come to the creation of the lower class of living creatures, the creatures below the two classes of created gods, two points may be noted. First we find the Maker telling the gods that, by right, they are perishable but that in his goodness he would not allow them to perish. Does this contradict the 'demonstration' of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* as a principle of motion? Perhaps. But it does not affect the more fundamental notion at the heart of the *Phaedo* and of the whole of Socrates' outlook, the notion of the eternity of the soul. Here in the *Timaeus* the Maker declares: *to men oun dê dethen pan luton* (41a-b), all that is put together can be broken apart. Any particular soul is compounded and, as such, is perishable. (Let us leave

aside for the moment the question whether that will happen or not.) But by its activity and creativity the soul is truly in eternity, is a moment of eternal Reality, or, if I may use my term for it, of Creative Eternity. In saying this I have already given the second of the two points I mentioned above: In the *muthos* the Maker, directing the gods to create the animals that are to populate the Earth, reserves for himself the creation of the human soul. This points to the divinity of the soul, which is the central message of the *Phaedo*.

When we are told that the "more ultimate origins" of fire and the other bodies "are known to god and to men whom god loves", are we to understand that the ultimate origins are known "to men whom god loves" in some kind of mystic revelation? Or are they known to wise men (whom, as wise, God necessarily loves) in some arcane knowledge hidden from the vulgar? Does this support the view that Plato had an esoteric philosophy? I do not think Plato's words here should be pressed. Perhaps this only means that, while what *Timaeus* is about to expound, being confined to the realm of becoming, can be appreciated by all men, the ultimate origins, the true *aitia*, can only be apprehended by the true philosopher who, in genuine dialectic, can attain the vision of ultimate Reality.

VI

The idea of the original chaos introduced in 30a emerges once again at 47-48 in the opposition of intelligence and necessity. The world is not the outcome of pure intelligence. For the actual, imperfect world to be intelligible, we need to have the element of brute existence, which Plato here names 'necessity'. The Necessity with which Intelligence has to work in the process of creation is, at any rate in my interpretation, the necessary existential givenness (or the necessary givenness of existence). Without the dimension of objective actuality (existence), Intelligence would rest in timeless contentment like Aristotle's First Cause. We have to think of Reality (the Good, God, the One) as having this dimension of existence in which or through which Reality perpetually asserts itself in fugitive realities.

Eternal reality can only have objective existence in actuality that is essentially fugitive: this is what I call the principle of transience in Book Two of my *Let Us Philosophize*.

Ultimately we have to see in reality the dimension of intelligence wrestling with the irrationality of sheer existence.

Once again, the same idea emerges in 49a in the guise of the receptacle, *hupodochê*, or nurse of all becoming, *pasês einai geneseôs hupodochên autên hoion tithênên*, even though Plato here presents the receptacle as a third principle beside the intelligible and the perceptible. We previously had intelligence and the intelligible forms on the one hand and the mutable images on the other hand. But the mutable images could not be if we did not have beside intelligence something out of which or in which the ephemeral images could be moulded. So we have the receptacle as the third kind of being. (Lee's 'forms of reality' can only cause confusion here.) I call this the dimension of existence or givenness or actuality. You could call it space, space-time, or matter in the sense of Aristotle's *hylê*. All of those are equally good fictions. The important thing is that, for the intelligibility of the world as we have it, ultimate Reality cannot be a Parmenidean One, but must have multiple dimensions. This, I believe, was also the lesson of the *Parmenides*.

The question is then posed whether we should speak of one universe or of a plurality or infinity of universes. Here we have another version of the Third Man riddle. If the universe was made in the likeness of the ideal model, *kata to paradeigma dedêmiourgêmenos*, it must be one, "for that which comprises all intelligible beings cannot have a double. There would have to be another being comprising them both ... In order therefore that our universe should resemble the perfect living creature in being unique, the maker did not make two universes or an infinite number, but our universe was and is and will continue to be his only creation" (31a-b, tr. Lee). Here the infinite regress argument is not used because the focus of discussion is on the uniqueness of the created world; but the principle that the intelligible paradigm does not itself stand in need of an anterior paradigm is there: the intelligible is self-sufficient. More simply we may say that since the metaphysical question relates to the origin of all being, a plurality of universes can only mean a plurality of mutually independent sub-systems of ultimate reality. Modern philosophers who discuss multiple universes are vainly trying to deal with a question that cannot even be coherently formulated.

VII

When Timaeus has to get down to the details of the making of the universe, he says that we have to consider the nature of fire, water, earth, and air. "For no one has yet explained their origin, but we talk as

if people knew what fire and each of the others are" (48b, tr. Lee). The crucial fault of philosophical thinking in our own day is that we fail to see that what Plato says here is as true today as it was then. Plato goes on to say, "It is not for us to describe the original principle or principles (call them what you will) of the universe, for the simple reason that it would be difficult to explain our view in the context of this discussion. ... I shall stick to the principle of likelihood which I laid down at the start ..." (48c-d, tr. Lee). To take into account "the original principle or principles" is only possible when we are concerned with the purely intelligible, with the highest section of the 'divided line'. This is out of the question here because here we, like Parmenides in the second part of his poem, are crossing the threshold and stepping into the Way of Seeming where we can descry no true principles — we have to be content with likelihood, which is all Plato is prepared to promise us.

Necessity is the irrational element in being, the irreducible ultimate givenness of the given. Its home and ground is the *hupodochê*, the receptacle and nurse of all fugitive existence. The *Timaeus* is Plato's 'Way of Seeming': Plato, like Parmenides, was obliged to make concession to the inescapable human wandering in the regions of phantasmata.

Incidentally, in the scheme of the *Timaeus* there is no place for lifeless matter. If the Earth is a god or goddess, and the whole cosmos is made up of gods or goddesses, where can there be anything lifeless?

Locke characterized things external to us as "stupid, inert, unthinking, matter." By what right could he say that? If we rid ourselves of the preconceived fiction of 'matter' we can see all things around us showing intelligence, creativity, and life. We cannot prove this and you may say that this is an imaginary vision, sheer poetry. But neither can we prove the contrary. All we can say is that the methods of objective science cannot give us understanding of the inner reality of things; on the other hand, philosophical speculation and poetry cannot give us knowledge of the actual particularities of things.

VIII

When Plato says in the *Timaeus* that "it is difficult to say with complete certainty which of the elements we really ought to call water rather than fire, or indeed which we ought to call by any name rather than by another" (49b, tr. Lee), we see how the fluidity of language and the fluidity of things are inseparable aspects of the universal flux of

existents. This thought underlies both the dialectic of the *Parmenides* and the general concept of dialectic in the *Republic*.

Reverting to his favourite metaphor of procreation, Plato says that we may compare the receptacle to the mother, the intelligible form to the father, and the product of their union to their offspring (50d). Plato keeps changing his metaphors because, above all philosophers, he sees clearly that all inquiry into first principles is an attempt to give expression to what is essentially ineffable.

Since the receptacle has to receive all the likenesses of the intelligible and eternal things, it must itself be devoid of all character. Hence the receptacle is "invisible and formless, all-embracing, possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, yet very hard to grasp" (51a-b, tr. Lee).

We learn that the elements of which the world was constituted were at first without proportion or measure, *panta taut' eichen alogôs kai ametrôs*, so that when the Maker of the universe prepared to do his work, his first step was to give them shape and number, *dieschêmatizato eidesi te kai arithmois* (53a-b). So the receptacle, space, matter, brute existence, can also be identified with the infinite or indefinite and is only reduced to order by submission to the intelligible form.

IX

No one can suppose that Plato meant his account of the formation of human beings and of the human body to be taken seriously. So why should we suppose the rest of the cosmogony to be taken literally when Plato has told us again and again that there can be no true knowledge of the phenomenal world?

The concluding section on the generation of "the other animals" (including women) who were not part of the original creation (90e-91c), is of the stuff of Plato's eschatological myths. Does not this tell us that the whole of the *Timaeus* was never meant to be more than a fable? Plato never seriously thought that we can have rational knowledge about the phenomenal world apart from the mathematical theories we may construct to account for the regularities of the heavenly bodies and of harmonics. Beside that, even the respectable 'sciences' of medicine, husbandry, navigation and ship-building, generalship, and the like, one and all are matter of opinion and conjecture.

Earlier we have been told: "And if, for relaxation, one gives up discussing eternal things, it is reasonable and sensible to occupy one's

leisure in a way that brings pleasure and no regrets, by considering likely accounts of the world of change" (59c-d, tr. Lee). We should take Plato at his word here. Outside the sphere of pure ideas – the proper sphere of philosophy – we can have nothing more than likely tales, for exercising our intelligence. So the whole of the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, by Plato's own declaration, should be regarded as no more than an imaginative exercise. And Plato never expected of natural 'science' anything more than that. Alas for our world, we have discovered that our likely tales can give us demonic powers which have lured us, filled us with vanity, and exacted and continue to exact a horrific price. Would it not have been better for humanity had we remained contented with our primitive subjection to nature, primitive myths about the origins of the world, conjoined with primitive insights into the profoundest realities and truest values? What does all our science and our technology add to the life of a Sappho or a Plato or even a simple shepherd boy from pre-historic times?

X

When proceeding to explain how bodies have their sensible qualities, Plato points out important principles of method that we have not yet absorbed. We cannot explain the sensibles objectively without taking sensation for granted; we cannot explain sensation objectively without taking the sensibles for granted (61c-d). There can be no final and complete objective explanation of anything. To forget this is to fall into the error of reductionism. Moderns have laughed their fill at the imbecile quiddities of the Scholastics, but underneath the imbecility there was the great insight of Socrates: in the end, the only explanation of a thing being hot is that it is hot because of hotness — it is hot for us because the mind has created the idea of the hot to redeem the obscurity of the given experience in the luminosity of the intelligible idea.

Having given his account of the parts of the soul, mortal and divine, Timaeus remarks that the truth of his account can only be asserted through divine confirmation, but that we may venture to claim now that it is likely (72e). Plato never loses sight of the radical distinction between the area of knowledge and that of conjecture. We think we have become too wise and too sophisticated to have any use for that distinction, and where we think we might apply it, we reverse Plato's order. We are utterly mistaken. Neither our philosophy nor our science will be healthy unless and until we realize that we can only have rational intelligence in philosophy and that all our science is conjecture.

To which side we shall affix the label 'knowledge' is immaterial — but we have to be clear as to the nature of each of these two distinct activities.

Desmond Lee in more than one context comments on the want of the idea of momentum in Plato and in Greek thought generally. So, in his introductory note to the section beginning at 79a, he writes, "But the Greeks had no idea of momentum, believing that all motion required the continuous exercise of force." I have commented on this before, but since it touches on a basic fault in our current thinking, I will not apologize for reiterating what I said before. Lee's remark shows how easily we can mistake a useful scientific fiction for an absolute truth. Modern physics tells us that inertia is a property of a body that causes it to resist changes in its velocity or, if stationary, to resist motion. A mysterious, mischievous fairy named Property is leading a sinister movement of resistance (certainly armed with hidden WMD), inciting any moving body to resist any change in its velocity, and at the same time inciting any body at rest to resist motion. Of course our scientists will tell us they do not mean that at all. All they mean is that we can make serviceable calculations on the assumption that there is such a property. But does that explain the Why? Any attempt to go beyond sterile mathematical formulae and think in terms of explanation obliges us to mythologize. In the end we have to conclude that science has nothing to do with explanation or with understanding or with ultimate truth.

We can never know what makes things move; we know what makes us move. Is it so unreasonable to think that what makes things move is similar to what makes us move? Perhaps, but then we will have to renounce all hope of understanding. If we insist on understanding, the only way open to us is to make myths that render things intelligible. But then again we have to know our myths for what they are — myths. We have to realize that understanding is a luminosity our minds produce and introduce into things. But then again I would say that unless intelligibility (and its ground, creative intelligence) were an original character in ultimate reality, I do not see how it could be produced in us.

In the *Phaedrus* Plato first, in the famous 'proof' of the immortality of the soul (245c-246a), establishes the principle of autonomy as the fundamental principle of all metaphysical thinking. A little further on, at 246b6, he says, *psuchê pasa pantos epimeleitai tou apsouchou*, all soul is in charge of all that is without soul. This is a principle that modern philosophers have lost sight of, indeed are blind to. The reality of our own spontaneity and creativity that is the one reality we are

immediately cognizant of is denied in favour of a conception of natural causation which is and can never be anything but an unprovable and truly unintelligible hypothesis.

In the end we find that the 'moral' of the dialogue is very Socratic. The long passage 89e3-90d7 reads very much like the didactic speeches in the *Euthydemus* and the *Lysis*. I cannot refrain from quoting the following lines in Jowett's beautiful rendering: "But he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom, and has exercised his intellect more than any other part of him, must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attain truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal, and since he is ever cherishing the divine power, and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be perfectly happy." This is the only immortality attainable by humans. The connection established here between the Socratic tendance of the soul and true happiness is not a mere play on the words *ton daimona* and *eudaimona einai*.

